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Marxism Today

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JAMES KLUGMANN — THE ROAD TO SOCIALISM

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Marxism Today

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The questions the three wise men forget

J. R. Campbell

THE decision of the Trades Union Congress to give evidence before the Committee on Prices, Production and Incomes ("the three wise men") will no doubt enhance the importance of that body and it is therefore important to examine what it is aiming to do.

The general idea is that it will be an impartial body explaining to the Government, the Employers and the Unions and to the population at large, what kind of wages and profits policy should be pursued "in the public interest". Yet when one looks at the composition of the committee it is difficult to see why it can be expected to have any different point of view from that of the Tory Government advisers in the Treasury or in the City. Sir Denis Robertson's place amongst British bourgeois economists is somewhat right of centre. His views on the necessity of the workers refraining from pressing for increased wages are well known. Sir Harold Howitt, a chartered accountant, was a member of the courts of inquiry into the engineering and shipbuilding strikes of last year. Lord Cohen was chairman of the Royal Commission on the Taxation of Profits and Income, whose recommendations were heavily biased in favour of the rich taxpayers. The respective ages of these gentlemen are sixty-seven, seventy and sixty-nine. If age means wisdom they are wise. Their opinions are the same as those of any men of similar age and background, selected from a London club, an employers' federation or the Tory Cabinet itself. The idea that they could make impartial recommendations strains credulity to breaking point.

Loaded Questions

These gentlemen have published the following questions which they want employers and unions to reply to:

1. The relation between general trends in prices, productivity, and incomes; and, in particular, the causes of the recent general rising trend of prices in the United Kingdom.
2. The importance of the general level of demand as a factor affecting the trends of prices, productivity and incomes.
3. The extent to which the authorities can and do control the general level of demand (*a*) by controlling the total supply of money and (*b*) by fiscal measures.
4. The importance of (*a*) wages and salaries; (*b*) profit margins; and (*c*) import prices as factors affecting the general trend of prices, productivity and incomes.
5. In so far as wages and salaries are an important factor the effect of the structure and working of the arrangements by which they are negotiated or otherwise decided.
6. The effect of restrictive practices on prices and productivity.
7. The part that could be played by "voluntary restraint" in the determination of wages, profits, and dividends, and the conditions necessary before such restraint could be expected from those who would have to exercise it.

These appear to be loaded questions, designed to prove that "the causes of the recent general rising trend of prices in the United Kingdom" are to be found in the demand for increased wages and salaries. Surely when one is enquiring about influences affecting the rise in prices, it is important to estimate the role of increased Government expenditure—including military expenditure—in doing so. Why is this not mentioned?

It is important to remember the type of society, namely monopoly capitalism, that these questions are related to. It would be useful of course to have a system of society, where there is full employment, a high rate of economic expansion, a rising standard of life, and a stable price level. But it might well be that you cannot have all these things within the framework of monopoly capitalism. If for example you insist on stable prices at all costs, you may not be able, capitalism being what it is, to get full employment. Because in monopoly capitalism there is a struggle between hostile classes, with diametrically opposed interests, it does not follow that you can always have a solution for a specific economic problem, that will be fair to everyone alike. The solution in the so-called "interest of the economy as a whole" may adversely affect one or other of the contending classes.

Take a situation in which the terms of trade move sharply against Britain so that it has to pay more for its food and its raw materials and the real national income falls temporarily. Who decides how the sacrifice is to be shared and can it be an "impartial decision"? Is it not more likely

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to be settled by a struggle between the various classes with the capitalist class as controllers of industry and finance, being placed at an advantage? This is particularly the case when there is a Tory Government, though it exists also when Labour is in office.

Neither does it follow that a solution which benefits one particular section of the capitalist class—for example the powerful City interests—is the one that is in the interests of the expansion of British capitalism. It is now generally admitted that the course taken by the City, in returning to the gold standard, at a certain parity in 1925, worked to the detriment of the British capitalist economy in its relations with the outside world. It could well be that some of the "City" policies adopted since the Tories returned in 1951 have had a similar effect.

It should further be noted that with the passing of the boom on an international scale, some of the basic problems presented by "the wise men" may disappear giving rise to others of an entirely different character. As however the wise men are obviously out to influence the wage struggle this year it is still necessary to deal with the questions they have raised, with the warning that some of them may recede in importance.

Britain—Metropolis of World Empire

In examining the questions it is necessary always to remember that Britain is the metropolis of a world empire, which whilst shrinking is by no means dead and indeed has still a very powerful will to live. That Empire emerged from the Second World War beset by heavy problems. Its exports were only 30 per cent of what they were before the war and had to be built up to approximately 80 per cent above pre-war, if Britain had to pay its way in the world. During the war the deficits in Britain's balance of payments amounted to over £4,000 million. These debts were met by sales of foreign investments, by payments from the gold and dollar reserves and by running up a formidable amount of sterling debts. The United Kingdom gold and dollar reserves in 1938 were £864 million. Its overseas sterling debts were £760 million. In December 1945 (after prices had risen to a formidable extent) its gold and dollar reserves were £610 million while its overseas sterling debts were £3,694 million. Thus while before the war the gold and dollar reserves were larger than the sterling debts, after the war the position was sharply reversed.

Against its will British imperialism had been forced to grant political independence to countries like India and Burma. It was determined, come what may, to exercise a large measure of economic control over those regions and to hang on as far as possible to the rest of the Empire. It was ready to make considerable sacrifices to achieve this end—or rather to make the British people accept considerable sacrifices. At the end of the war, British imperialism, dependent on the United States for a significant part of its food and raw materials was faced with formidable tasks. It had to build up its exports and thereby to reduce British dependence on the U.S.A., it had to achieve an export surplus to enable it to resume investment in its Dominions and Colonies, it had to build up its gold and dollar reserves, and it had to begin the modernisation of its coal and power and transport industries. These would have been formidable tasks in any circumstances but in its desire to maintain the empire, British imperialism had to retain a formidable military establishment. Even before the great re-armament drive of 1950 British imperialism was maintaining forces greatly in excess of pre-war. "Defence" expenditure was £774 million in 1950 (1938—£254 million), and manpower was 660,000 (1938—381,000). More serious was the overseas military expenditure which before the war was so negligible that it was never mentioned in the public accounts of 1938 but which between 1941 and 1951 absorbed at least £1,108 million.

A last feature of the situation must be emphasised. The mass of the British people emerged from World War Two with a number of very clearly defined objectives. They wanted to end the plague of mass unemployment, they wanted decent homes for all, they wanted an improvement of the social services, and they wanted higher wages and salaries. The monopoly capitalists, deeply discredited by their pre-war appeasement of the Nazis were in no position flatly to oppose those demands, especially as a Labour Government had been returned against their will. But they were determined to do all in their power to ensure that improved social services were not financed at their expense. They temporised while preparing a come-back.

Post-War Inflation—First Wave

The conventional picture of the post-war situation now depicted by the Tories and unfortunately accepted by some workers is roughly as follows. Because there were jobs for all during the post-war period the workers have been pressing regularly for increased wages. The employers have however passed those increases on to the consumer and prices have risen. Then the workers go in for higher wages and then there are higher prices, world without end. That is

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inflation and the only way to bring it to an end is to stop going in for increased wages, the Government experts tell us.

The starting-point is entirely false. For there was a state of suppressed inflation when the workers emerged from the war. Profits, salaries and wages had been paid out for war work while the production of goods had been curtailed and such goods as were produced were, with the inevitable dodging and black-marketing, subject to rationing. "Too much money chasing too few goods" while untrue for certain sections of the people—low-paid workers, old-age pensioners and the like—was true for society as a whole. While necessities were tightly rationed, the flow of pent-up purchasing power was concentrated on non-rationed goods which shot up enormously in price. The cheap money policy of the Government was meant to facilitate housing development and the reconstruction of industry. In fact cheap credit was also available for financing the black market in rationed goods and in rationed raw materials. Long before some of the raw material controls were lifted, they were being shot to pieces. At a crucial moment in the immediate post-war period, the American food and material controls were abolished. This meant higher prices for U.S. foods and raw materials on which the European countries were heavily dependent. In Britain this meant in some cases higher prices and in others higher subsidies.

For in the immediate post-war period, despite price controls and subsidies, the workers had to battle against the consequences of the "suppressed inflation" of the war years and against the consequences of higher prices emanating from countries like the U.S.A., which had made a bonfire of controls almost as soon as the war was over. It was these developments which, in the period between the end of the war and the devaluation of the pound in 1949, were the most influential in determining the level of prices in Britain. Wages followed prices with a fairly considerable lag. In December 1950, for example, the index of weekly wage rates was 13 per cent above the level of June 1947. The index of retail prices was 16 per cent above.

There is a well-known observation of Marx which fits most of the wage struggle of the post-war period. "In all cases I have considered, and they form ninety-nine out of a hundred, you have seen that the struggle for a rise in wages follows only in the track of previous changes, and is the necessary offspring of previous changes in the amount of production, the productive powers of labour, the value of labour, the value of money, the extent or intensity of labour extracted, the fluctuations of demand and supply and coexistent with the different phases of the industrial cycle; in one word *as reactions of labour against the previous action of capital.*

"By treating the struggle for a rise of wages, independently of all these circumstances, by looking only on the change of wages, and overlooking all the other changes from which they emanate, you proceed from a false premise in order to arrive at false conclusions." (*Value, Price and Profit.*)

The questions of the wise men, leaving out as they do the post-war economic environment, into which the working-class emerged, are almost framed to produce the conclusion that the major factor in the post-war economic situation has been the working class drive for increased wages, when in fact that drive is a defence against constantly rising prices.

Should Workers Make Sacrifices?

The working class in 1946 had gained certain improvements in their living standards as compared with pre-war. They saw those living standards threatened by rising prices, and defended them accordingly. If the wise men want to know the main driving force of the post-war wages movement, it is the traditional one of the working class having achieved a certain standard of life, resisting all attempts to undermine it. The trade union movement aims to achieve certain living standards and to protect them from the downward pressures of capitalist society. It has always, though sometimes unsuccessfully resisted the assumption that if the capitalist economy is encountering certain difficulties, the workers ought to help it by accepting lower living standards. It will go on resisting this whatever foolish things wise men say.

The first outstanding occasion of this assumption that the workers ought to accept some sacrifice of living standards was on the occasion of the devaluation of the pound in 1949, when it was expected that the cost of food and raw materials imported into Britain was likely to rise. (They did in fact rise after a certain interval, but it is very difficult to disentangle the rise due to devaluation from the rise due to the arms boom which followed less than a year after devaluation.)

The spokesman of the proposition that the workers ought to make some sacrifice was the late Ernest Bevin, who suggested that the unions should refrain from asking for increased wages until the cost of living had gone up by at least 5 per cent. Despite Bevin's authority, this suggestion was totally ignored. The 1950 Trades Union Congress formally rejected the wage freeze.

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Post-War Inflation—Second Wave

The "suppressed inflation" of wartime was not however allowed to work itself out, for in 1950 it was reinforced by a powerful new dose of inflation, due (1) to the scramble for raw materials and (2) to the great armaments drive which followed the outbreak of the Korean war. There was a fierce scramble for food and raw materials on the part of governments and on the part of private speculators anticipating a long war. The cost of living, despite food controls and subsidies, took a sharp upward leap. The index of retail prices which in December 1950 was 16 per cent above the level of 1947, reached 30 per cent above in 1951. This was the biggest jump in British retail prices in the post-war period and even the most outrageously biased individuals will hardly pretend that it was due to the British workers selfishly pushing up their wages. Again there was the usual appeal for the workers to tolerate some price increases as part of their contribution to national defence. This was usually put in the form of asserting that it was necessary to devote productive capacity to exports and to rearmament first and that this necessitated some reduction in consumption.

In a Treasury *Broadsheet on Britain* issued in 1951 (i.e. in the concluding months of the Labour Government) there is the following statement:

"What about the cost of living—doesn't that justify wage claims? Prices have certainly been going up recently but that has been chiefly because of rising import costs. The whole nation is paying more for what it buys from other nations. That is the price we must all pay and like the taxes we pay, *it is partly because of rearmament. Any one asking for a bigger pay packet just because import prices are higher is trying to contract out of the nation's difficulties. He is also helping to put up prices further whereas wage restraint limits price increases.*" (Italics ours.)

In the same issue there is a quotation from Mr. Hugh Gaitskell, then Chancellor of the Exchequer. "I do not think that we should advocate the return to a complete wage freeze. For one thing most of us would not wish to see the wages of the low paid workers held down rigidly, while prices were going up." The implication was that the wages of all workers outside the low paid should be held down in these circumstances.

It should be noted that the share of the consumers in the increases in production which were taking place in this period fell from 59 per cent in 1948 to 57 per cent in 1949, 56 per cent in 1950 and 55 per cent in 1951.

Public authority spending (reflecting the increased military expenditure) took 64 per cent of the annual increase of production in 1951 and 129 per cent in 1952. The increase in this latter year was at the expense of exports.

Up till the advent of the Tory Government one can say that it was not one of the *declared aims* of the Government to increase the cost of living. Increases took place as a by-product of Government measures aimed at other things—such as devaluation or the arms drive.

But the Tory Government came into office determined to take certain measures to increase the cost of living. It proposed to cut consumers' food subsidies and to lift price controls, to relax the Rent Act, and to raise the rents of council houses. It proceeded to carry out this policy gradually but persistently. It was helped by the collapse in 1952 of the food and raw materials boom which followed the outbreak of the Korean war. This prevented prices from rising to the extent that would otherwise have been the case but there was some rise nevertheless. It has been argued that the reduction of food subsidies by themselves would not have had a great effect because the amount of subsidies was small in relation to the total food expenditure and to the total cost of living.

Post-War Inflation—Third Wave

It is not a question of food subsidies alone however but of food subsidies and price controls being swept away, in other words of the freeing of the food speculators. The Tories did not deny that the lifting of price controls and rationing would mean high prices but merely that in the long run the higher prices would lead to an increase in supply, and would end shortages—an argument that was of course much more convincing to the well-to-do than to the average worker.

Between 1950 and 1956 the British cost of living index went up much more than any of the major European countries. This was not due to the fact that wages in Britain rose faster than those of the main European countries. In West Germany, Britain's main competitor, money wages rose by 53 per cent between 1950 and 1956. In Britain they rose by 54 per cent. Yet because the German cost of living rose to a lesser extent than the British, German real earnings per hour rose by 35 per cent and British real earnings by 12 per cent. This different can *not* be explained by the wage demands of the British workers but by certain features which exist in Britain and not in Germany. Britain's "defence" expenditure per head in this period has been twice that of any other European country. It has mortgaged the resources of the engineering industry and has meant that this industry, if it was to carry out

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its export tasks, would have less resources to devote to re-equipping British industry in general, than any country in Western Europe. The following figures (from the *Economist* Intelligence Unit's Survey "Britain and Europe") illustrate the position. Investment in machinery and equipment as a percentage of the gross national income between 1951 and 1954 was as follows:

West Germany 10.9 per cent, Belgium 7.6 per cent, France 8 per cent, Italy 12.8 per cent, Netherlands 11.8 per cent, United Kingdom 6.5 per cent, Austria 10 per cent, Denmark 10.5 per cent, Norway 13.9 per cent, Sweden 7.5 per cent.

As a consequence of this, annual percentage increase of the gross national income was as follows between 1950 and 1955: West Germany 9.8 per cent, Belgium 3.1 per cent, France 4.2 per cent, Italy 5.9 per cent, Netherlands 4.9 per cent, United Kingdom 2.9 per cent, Austria 6.9 per cent, Denmark 1.5 per cent, Norway 3.5 per cent, Sweden 3 per cent.

The same publication makes an estimate of the growth of productivity (i.e. production per worker employed) in manufacturing machinery between 1950 and 1956 in a number of European countries. In West Germany it was 41 per cent, in France 49 per cent, in Italy 55 per cent, in the Netherlands 27 per cent, in the United Kingdom 12 per cent, in Norway 25 per cent and in Sweden 25 per cent.

So we can say that between 1951 and 1954 the Tory Government was doing two things (1) it was pushing up prices by the reduction of the food subsidies and the ending of price controls; (2) its defence policy was restricting the re-equipping of British industry and therefore the growth of productivity. There is no reason to look for an explanation as to why British prices were behaving differently in these years from those of any other European country.

The Boom of 1954-1955

At last in 1954, the Government was forced to recognise that British capitalism was falling behind in the re-equipment of industry.

The Treasury Bulletin for Industry for May 1954 indicates the reasons. "Investment in the United Kingdom has been limited at various times in the last five years by steel shortages, *by the Defence programme,* and by the need to increase engineering exports. *In* 1951 *and* 1952 *the Government discouraged investment because the claims of exports and the Defence programme had to have priority.*" (Italics ours.)

"While there has been little change in productive investment in this country, *over the past few years* investment in the United States, West Germany and in some other European countries has gone on rising." (Italics ours.) These developments were noted in the Budget speeches of Mr. Butler in 1953 and 1954 who stressed the necessity of the Government giving some stimulus to investment in private industry. In the 1953 Budget he restored the initial allowances to firms engaging in investment and in 1954 he replaced this with a new and more favourable investment allowance.

"I expect [the cost of the investment allowances] to reach a considerable figure in the future. But insofar as this new allowance succeeds in its object of creating additional assets, these assets will of course be yielding additional revenue for the country, for their owners, and for me." (Budget Speech, April 6th, 1954.)

Although it was clearly recognised by Government spokesmen that the very existence of a huge arms programme had obstructed capital development in the past, Mr. Butler actually increased arms expenditure in the same Budget. "The net cost of Defence to the Budget this year will therefore be £1,555 million as compared with £1,497 million the year before—the increase of £58 million which I have already mentioned. Moreover, our Defence commitments impose a considerable burden on our balance of payments. The overseas element in Defence expenditure is probably at least £350 million a year."

From Boom to Squeeze

If however arms expenditure was not cut to make room for the capital development programme then that programme could only develop as a result of cuts in exports or in expenditure on consumer goods. Its initial impact was on exports. Less than a year after Mr. Butler announced his policy of capital development the balance of payments began to run into difficulties and the Bank Rate was increased.

Just eighteen months after—and four months after a General Election in which the most grandiose promises were made by the Tories—an Autumn Budget became necessary to rectify the position. Butler declared that the crisis was due to "our growing pains". He hinted at the heavy military commitments—"we have taken on many and varied overseas burdens far greater than many of our competitors, such as Western Germany"—but did nothing about it. His main "remedies" were to cut capital expenditure on the nationalised industries and on social service building and to raise the working class cost of living by an all-round increase of purchase tax and by cutting the subsidies on council houses building—in other words to find the major solution by a reduction

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of the workers' standards of life. Once again the Tory policy of asking the workers to exercise wage restraint while the Government actually raised the cost of living against them, was enunciated. The Economic Commission for Europe and other international bodies warned the British and other governments that their so-called "remedies" might not work because the workers would resist cuts in their living standards. "A specific defect of these measures is that, while curtailing real consumer demand, they are likely to affect the cost of living and thus to increase wage pressures" (Economic Survey of Europe, 1956).

The long term objectives of Government policy were to reduce home demand, particularly in light engineering, and cause the employers to switch from the home market to the foreign market. It was expected that as the industries producing consumer goods (including durables) slackened, labour would leave them for the export industries and that after a short period of adjustment, British capitalist economy would go forward again. There was certainly a switch to exports which began to rise in 1956. But the labour thrown out of the consumer industries did not in the main go to the export industries. "Employment declined in many consumer goods industries; these declines were only partially offset by increases in the capital goods and export industries. The release of skilled personnel may have helped these latter sectors appreciably. *Some manpower released from the temporarily depressed sectors was however absorbed in the service industries.*" (The report of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation on Economic Conditions in the United Kingdom issued on December 23rd, 1957.) A heavy price was paid for these so-called adjustments. "*The measures to redress the balance of the economy retarded the growth of production for two years*" (O.E.E.C. report. Italics ours). No other European country suffered such stagnation. In France the general index of industrial production in June 1957 was 50 per cent above the level of 1953, in West Germany it was 48 per cent, in Italy it was 35 per cent, in Holland 25 per cent, in Norway 31 per cent, in Britain 17 per cent and in the United States 8 per cent. What effrontery it is for a government to announce that there should be no wage increases except on the grounds of increased production and productivity and then takes steps to strangle economic development. Even the gain in exports in 1956 did not yield the results which it could, owing to the Suez war. "There has been an important, if limited, improvement in the balance of trade since 1955. But an improvement in the trade balance has been partly offset by the deterioration of some invisible earnings due to the Suez disturbances and an increased partly speculative outflow of private capital." (O.E.E.C. report.)

"In the early months of the present year a new expansionary phase seemed to be setting in. But in September the Government found it necessary to impose new restraints on the economy." (O.E.E.C. report.) So after two years stagnation of production, the Government stranglehold was further tightened.

We have seen that since the end of the war the United Kingdom has been running on a meagre supply of gold and dollar reserves. The monopoly capitalists have preferred (1) to maintain a huge arms programme, (2) to indulge in considerable overseas military expenditure and (3) to expand capital exports at the expense of gold and dollar reserves. Part of the function of reserves is to enable an economy to meet any unexpected difficulties in international trade without having to restrict its economic activities. In fact British Governments have never been able to do this. Faced with foreign trade difficulties they have invariably panicked and shouted for wage restraint, cuts in the social services and slowing down of capital investment.

The 1957 Squeeze

This time the Government is at the old game of blaming wage increases though as we have shown increases in money wages in Britain have been about the same as in Western Germany and increases in real wages have been much less. The following factors however stuck out a mile: (1) the two years stagnation in production, in striking contrast to most other European countries, (2) the fall in raw material prices in the British Colonies and Dominions (partly the effect of the stagnation in production in Britain and the U.S.A.) always a harbinger of growing economic difficulties in Britain, (3) the loss of gold and dollar reserves due to the Suez adventure and (4) the wide loopholes in the sterling area exchange controls through which unscrupulous British speculators were operating to the detriment of the currency. These visible facts about Tory policy were more likely to influence international speculation against the pound than anything else. Of course, the Government was only too anxious to find an excuse for a centrally imposed policy of wage restraint. "The new restraints on domestic activity were equally intended to make a direct attack on the problem of rising prices" (O.E.E.C. report). This when the Government had just raised rents and was proposing to do the same in April is indeed rich.

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The Government's Responsibility

Really to throw light on the post-war situation we have had to examine some factors which the wise men have left out. The basic question which they ignore is the effect of the war and its aftermath, and of Government policy since the war on the level of prices.

There are roughly three great waves of price rises since the end of the war: 1946-48, which reflected the suppressed inflation which was a heritage of the war. Special factors like the lifting of price controls in the United States helped to give prices a further upward push. It was price increases which gave rise to wage increases during this period, when the unions were certainly paying heed to the Labour Party's appeals for wage restraint.

The second great rise, in the aftermath of the outbreak of the Korean war, was due to the stock-piling of raw materials and to the doubling of the arms programme. This was one of the most significant events of the post-war period. Clearly it was Government action again which touched off the price rise. To leave this out of account in consideration of the post-war wage and price situation in Britain, is nothing short of fraud. Yet the wise men's questions leave no scope for this point being considered.

The third big price rise took place after 1954, during the period when a genuine industrial boom was taking place (though terribly hampered and obstructed by the huge arms programme that the Government was still maintaining). Again Government policy comes into this because food prices and the cost of living advanced as a result of the cutting of food subsidies and the lifting of price controls. Throughout the whole period from 1954 onwards the workers lived in a situation where some Government measures had been introduced which had pushed up prices and other measures having the same end in view were on their way. They had to maintain more or less continuous pressure for increased wages otherwise their living standards would have been drastically cut. Never at any time dared they relax because the Government kept on launching attack after attack. The present Rent Act which has already led to the cost of living increases in the last two months (and which involves further rent increases in April) must have been drafted in those very months at the end of 1955 and the beginning of 1956 when Macmillan was pleading for a "price plateau". It is these factors, particularly the high military expenditure throughout the period, which explain why British internal prices in recent years have risen to a greater extent than those of other European countries.

It is in the light of this situation that we look at the loaded questions on productivity which the wise men have put. They are obviously meant to lead up to the conclusion that there should be no increases in wages unless there has been a prior increase in productivity. The British trade union movement will never accept this proposition. It exists to defend and advance the standard of life of its members. If prices go up due to world causes, or if they are pushed up by Government policy, then the unions must claim increased wages to meet the increased cost of living. It would be particularly outrageous for the unions to tie wages to increases in production under a Government which periodically clamps down on production in an alleged effort to solve balance of payment crises and whose record with regard to promoting the re-equipment of British industry has been much less than that of any country in Western Europe.

Wages and Productivity

Nor can the trade union movement accept the general proposition that increases in productivity (which are of course also increases in exploitation) will of themselves rebound to the benefit of the workers. There have been cases of remarkable increases in productivity (Japan before the late war and the U.S. during most periods of its history) whose benefits were not passed on to the workers. Only when there is a strong trade union movement insistent on higher wages and shorter hours and able to protect its members against speed-up, can productivity be made, in spite of the capitalists, to yield certain benefits to the workers. But, so far from productivity leading directly to higher wages, it would be more to the point to say that it is the existence of higher wages, based originally on labour shortage, that rendered the capitalists in the U.S.A. and the British Dominions more susceptible to the introduction of labour saving devices. The more the situation in the labour market favours the workers the more the capitalists are forced to try to recover some of the ground that has been lost by introducing new equipment which will increase productivity and of course intensify labour. Maybe some of Britain's comparative lack of urgency about the re-equipment of industry has been due to the fact that since the war the capitalists have not been subjected to sufficiently heavy pressure for increased wages and shorter hours. If the workers had been more concerned to increase basic wage rates, if they had pressed for the 40-hour week, if there had been less willingness to supplement relatively low wage rates by overtime, Britain's capitalists might have been forced to show a greater interest in re-equipment than they did in

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the post-war period. In a period of rising productivity and strong trade union pressure, wage increases need not be reflected in rising prices. It is surely the Government which must grasp this lesson. For it is the Government (1) which has diverted resources to rearmament which might have gone to capital re-equipment, (2) which has pushed up the working class cost of living by a series of reactionary devices and (3) which has sought to "control" the economy by methods that have led to prolonged periods of industrial stagnation.

Workers and Restrictive Practices

So the wise men's questions about "the effect of restrictive practices on prices and productivity" might first be addressed to the Government whose measures the O.E.E.C. says "retarded the growth of production for two years". The 1957 blue book on National Income and Expenditure shows the growth of the gross domestic product (in terms of 1948 prices) which enables us by eliminating price changes to measure the increase of real income from year to year. Between 1952 and 1953 it grew by £469 million, between 1953 and 1954 it grew by £502 million, between 1954 and 1955 it grew by £458 million. The credit squeeze and other devices were applied in the autumn of 1955. The result was that between 1955 and 1956 the gross national product only grew by £176 million—that is the cost in constant prices of the Government's restrictive practices.

Those Tory Government restrictive practices, which were originally introduced to combat the danger of a deficit in the balance of payments and later to deal with inflation are now being continued, when the situation in the capitalist world has changed and when there is the danger of the slump spreading from the U.S.A. to Europe. The retention of credit restrictions in these circumstances can only accelerate the coming of a slump in Britain.

No one will deny that there are some restrictive practices amongst some workers but not all the practices that the employers and their supporters denounce are such. Many practices introduced by the workers are not aimed at restricting production but at restricting exploitation. When an employer introduces a new process he aims to have it operated or supervised by the minimum number of men. He may set the number of men so low that the new process may involve a heavy strain on the individual worker. In these circumstances the trade unions may insist on a higher standard of manning, in the interest of protecting their members from overstrain. Or take another example which is often mentioned in the capitalist press where a group of workers limit the amount which an individual may earn by piecework. In doing so they are concerned to protect themselves against speed-up. They are concerned not merely with average earnings for the job but with the average pace for the job. No body of workers on payment by results are going to forgo earnings by working below a fair average pace. Neither however are they going to allow themselves to be speeded up by the employers or the short-sighted and greedy amongst their own mates.

There are of course restrictive practices, though very much less than is believed, based on the fear of unemployment. The Government is doing its best, by its present policy of trying to create unemployment, to perpetuate such practices.

Methods of Negotiation

The question about the effects of "the structure and working of the arrangements by which they (wages and salaries) are negotiated or otherwise decided" has some interesting implications. In contrast to the U.S.A. where agreements are usually concluded between the unions and particular firms, agreements in Britain are usually nation-wide agreements concluded between unions and employers' federations. Naturally such federations are composed of firms with very different degrees of profitability. In general an employers' federation in arriving at an agreement on basic wage rates and related questions, will try to base itself not on the most modern firms, but on firms of average or less than average profitability (which may in some cases be quite big and influential firms). In times of full employment, good organisation in the workshop may enable the workers to win concessions from firms where the degree of exploitation and of profitability is high. These may be frequently expressed in more favourable conditions with regard to bonus and piece-work earnings. Thus while all the members of the unions in a given industry may be on the same basic rate and general conditions, their actual weekly earnings (depending on payment by results plus overtime) may vary considerably. A worker of the same *grade* may earn a lot more in an up-to-date motor firm than in a general engineering works. But those workers whose earnings are based on factory negotiations may find their good conditions more vulnerable in the event of slump.

Indeed, the employers can move to revise the favourable conditions under which they are working much more easily than they can move to revise nationally negotiated basic rates. I believe that it is a major defect of union policy in the post-war period that the unions did not push up

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the basic rates more than they have done. They have allowed too large a gap to develop between basic rates and actual earnings. This should be remedied. Basic rates must be pushed closer to actual earnings (for a normal working-week). This does not mean that workers in the profitable firms should not wherever possible exert a squeeze in order to get a little extra. But the unions have clearly got to get away from accepting basic rates based on what the marginal firms ("rat firms" in workshop parlance) can pay.

Maybe the wise men want to discuss whether their wage applications should be spread out over a longer period—every two years, instead of every year, or every eighteen months. The answer is simple. There has scarcely been a year since the end of the war when trade unions were not faced with rising prices due to factors other than wages. To extend the period between negotiations would, in these circumstances, only have caused wage rates to lag still more behind the rising cost of living.

The employers would also like to end the practice whereby wage rates negotiated between the unions and the employers become virtually compulsory through the industry. They would like to return to a situation where such rates were confined to federated shops and to such of the firms as the unions forced to accept them, leaving quite a number of small and medium firms which consistently paid below the rate.

Credit Squeeze and Bank Rates

The question about the extent to which the authorities can and do control the general level of demand by controlling the total supply of money and by fiscal changes, has already been partially answered. The outstanding fiscal change made in this period was the reduction of food subsidies and after 1955 the raising of purchase tax and the reduction of the housing subsidy.

The aim was to cut the real purchasing power of the workers and lower middle-class and therefore their demand for goods. It was partially successful in cutting demand, but justifiably provoked demands for further wage increases. The control of the total supply of money (credit squeeze and high interest rate) succeeded in reducing some home demand for durable consumers' goods (motors) and has forced capitalists to pay some more attention to the export markets. As it only succeeded in doing this by methods which produced stagnation in British production for two years (causing a loss of approximately £900 million in production) it is a very dubious and clumsy device indeed.

The main impulse in the wages movement has been the desire to maintain the standard of life achieved in the first post-war periods. Whether price rises were due to world causes, to leaps in military expenditure, to Government cuts in subsidies, they were countered by the workers demanding wage increases. This is a principle that the unions will never abandon. Inasmuch as the workers were also aware that their increased productivity was leading to increased profits they made claims on this account.

Wages and Prices

The question as to how far increased wages merely lead to increased prices is not too easy to answer statistically. If the average wage rates are taken however, it is clear that they have increased a little faster than the increase in the cost of living and if average earnings (which are inflated by overtime) they have when allowance has been made for the increased cost of living, been increased by 20 per cent in real purchasing power, so the wages movement has been worthwhile. In its absence there would have been a sharp fall in the living standards of wage and salary earners.

The last question on "voluntary restraint" deserves a theoretical and a practical answer. The Tory policy has been to free the capitalists from all restraints, except those of the market, and to allow them to get the highest price they were able to get, for the goods which they produce. In these circumstances the workers' position would soon deteriorate, relative to that of the capitalists, if the unions were to cease to try to get the highest possible price for their labour. In a Socialist society, where there is no class living on surplus value extorted from the workers, it is possible to decide how much of current production will go to raising wages or lowering prices, how much to improved social services and how much to capital development. These things are settled in capitalist society however by the struggle of contending classes and there is no way, given the capitalist basis, of settling them otherwise except by seeking to deprive the workers of the right to push up wages, while leaving the capitalists free to push up prices—a solution that the workers will resist with all their might.

The search for a national wages policy is fundamentally a search for ways and means of restricting the activity of the workers in the interests of capitalism and as such should be resisted. There are of course, real problems for Britain which are raised in the current discussion, but the solution can only be found outside the capitalist framework.

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The Road to Socialism

James Klugmann

I. THE ESSENTIAL PROBLEM

THE Political Resolution of the Twenty-Fifth Congress of the British Communist Party and the Statement of the Communist Parties of the twelve socialist countries both emphasised that there are certain essential principles or laws that govern the socialist revolution and the advance to socialism, but that these principles must be applied in accordance with the specific conditions in each particular country.

The Resolution of the Twenty-Fifth Congress stated:

> "While the advance to socialism must have special features in accordance with the conditions in each country, there are certain essential features which apply to all countries."

The Declaration of the Twelve explained:

> "The experience of the Soviet Union and the other socialist countries has fully borne out the correctness of the Marxist-Leninist propositions that the processes of the socialist revolution and the building of socialism are governed by a number of basic laws applicable in all countries embarking on a socialist course. These laws manifest themselves everywhere, alongside a great variety of historic national peculiarities and traditions which must by all means be taken into account."

To understand the principles of the transition to socialism, whilst applying them concretely, specifically, to the existing conditions in the world at a given period and to the peculiarities of each country, is the *essential problem* of leadership in the advance to socialism.

Each country will have its own, its specific road to socialism, will find its own *form* of advance to socialism, but whilst the *forms* change the *essence* remains the same.

The new draft of the *British Road to Socialism* is about to be published, and it is, precisely, an attempt, on the basis of the essential principles of Marxism-Leninism, to work out the special, specific road to socialism of Britain in the world of today, in a world which is itself in transition to socialism, and where the forces of socialism are becoming visibly stronger than the forces of imperialism.

II. THE UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES

Socialist Revolution

The first essential principle is the understanding of the necessity of a *socialist revolution* in order to end capitalism and begin the advance to socialism. A revolution means a change of political power in which power passes out of the hands of the older, now reactionary, class, into the hands of a historically progressive class, just as a counter-revolution is the reverse of this process.

A socialist revolution means that political power passes into the hands of the working class leading its allies of the working people as a whole, for the purpose of ending capitalism (imperialism) and building socialism.

This first principle means coming head-on against the classic ideas of reformism which have so long exerted a dominating influence on the British working class, paralysed their vast organisations, and brought to fiasco, again and again, the efforts, courage, sacrifices and militancy of millions.

The reformists, from the Fabians of the 1880s, through Ramsay MacDonald and Jimmy Thomas to Morrison and Gaitskell, have sought to advance by gradual reforms *within the framework of capitalism,* to graft "socialism" on to capitalism piecemeal and by gradual reforms. The crux of the issue lies in their attitude to the state. For them the state is something that is neutral and above classes, impartial, of no concern to the working class. Therefore, all that is necessary is to win a Parliamentary majority and use the *existing state* for economic reform. The transformation of the economy is therefore considered unconnected with the transformation of the state. The very word "power" is confused with governmental office. In other words all the trump cards are left in the hands of the class enemy, and the advance to socialism is foredoomed from the first to defeat.

The issue of the state has been, in a sense, the historic weak spot, the Achilles heel, of the British Labour movement. Even the early British Marxists tended to neglect it. And yet, in Britain, as in all other capitalist countries, the state is an organ (which has progressively grown more powerful) of the capitalist class.

Any serious study (see John Gollan *The British Political System* and the forthcoming book *The British State* by R. Simon and K. Hood), as well as the hard facts of life and experience, supports

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this. By a process of careful *selection* the key positions in the armed forces, security, civil service, judiciary are staffed by faithful representatives of capitalism, the state has extended its scope to the nationalised boards of industry; it has vast power over the minds of the population through the educational system, B.B.C. and television.

It is impossible in any country to achieve the *economic* aims of socialism, to establish the social ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, within the framework of the existing *capitalist* state. The transformation of the economy demands, necessitates, the transformation of the state. To achieve economic power the people, led by the working class, need political power and this, precisely, is the purpose of the socialist revolution.

Control of the state has to be taken out of the hands of the capitalists. A state has to be built that will be in the hands of the working class at the head of the working people, and that will act in their interests.

The first principle, therefore, of advance to socialism is the necessity of socialist revolution, the winning of political power by the working class at the head of the working people. But this, of course, does not mean that the socialist revolution will take the same form, will be accomplished in the same way, in every country.

Dictatorship of the Proletariat

The *capitalist* nature of the state under capitalism along with the capitalist control of the economy means that, in the last analysis, *every* capitalist country is the *dictatorship of the bourgeoisie*. The working class and the people can through their struggles win very considerable democratic rights within capitalism, and the working class will never be indifferent to what sort of capitalist regime there is. The working class will never cease its fight for the extension of democracy *within* capitalism. But so long as the capitalist class controls the state and holds political power the freedom of the people, of the majority, is restricted within relatively narrow limits.

The socialist revolution means a qualitative change. Political power passes into the hands of the working class at the head of the working people. For the first time in the history of class society power is held by the majority, and not only by a majority, but by a majority whose aim is to end all class privileges whatsoever and achieve a classless society.

But it is not enough to win political power. For a whole period of society in which, step by step, capitalism is ended and socialism established, power has to be *held* and *used* to defend the revolution and to build socialism. The dictatorship of the capitalist minority is replaced by the rule of the working class allied with the great majority of the people, called by Marx *the dictatorship of the proletariat*.

The rule of the working class at the head of the working people and in the interests of the vast majority of the people (dictatorship of the proletariat) has, in a sense, two sides to it which cannot be separated.

One side is the defence of working class rule from the inevitable attacks (which take every form) from the defeated capitalists at home and the centres of imperialism abroad. This necessitates a strong working class state, a strong army and security (at least in the period of world history when capitalism is still an important force).

The other side is the task of building socialism, developing a strong socialist industry and agriculture, a planned economy, the lifting step by step of the living standards of the people, a vast extension of the cultural life of the people, a continuous fight for socialist ideas, for a socialist morality, for ideas of racial and national equality, of human brotherhood.

The dictatorship of the proletariat, the rule of the working class at the head of the working people, means an immense extension of democracy for the majority of the people whatever restrictions it may mean (according to the particular circumstances) for the former ruling minority. It means bringing millions of working men and women into the administration of the state and the national economy, opening up to millions of people totally new possibilities of personal development, leisure, study, and culture.

Every country must of necessity pass through such a period of transition on the road to a classless socialist society, but this is *not* to say that in each case the *form* of the dictatorship of the proletariat will be identical.

It will always be the aim of the working class in every country to proceed as fast as possible with the constructive tasks of building socialism.

But how far it is able to do this—how far it is able to cut down its expenditure on defence, on war, and to proceed full steam ahead with socialist construction—depends, also, not on the working class and its allies alone, but on the strength and attitude of the imperialists in the world as a whole and in each particular country.

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Building a Socialist Economy

The advance towards socialist society, where there will be full social ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange means proceeding step by step with the building of a socialist economy.

It means developing a socialist industry by the nationalisation of the key sectors of industry, until, step by step, the whole of industry is owned by the people as a whole.

This means a fully *socialist* nationalisation as distinct from the type of nationalisation that can be achieved within the framework of capitalism. This means that compensation (which in itself is quite possible as a tactical measure and to distinguish the "small people" from the former big capitalists) must be reduced radically; that the nationalised boards must be composed of working class people and technicians loyal to socialism; that nationalisation must be extended step by step to *all* fields of industry starting with the most vital; that the state which is doing the owning and controlling of the nationalised industries should be the state of the working people led by the working class.

Along with the progressive socialist transformation of industry must go the *gradual* socialist transformation of agriculture; which means, in countries where there is a large peasantry or a considerable section of small farmers, winning them, step by step, towards co-operative, collective farming.

On this basis, step by step, a planned economy comes into existence, that can, progressively, give full rein to the development of the productive forces, end crises and unemployment, and lift the living standards of the people as a whole.

Working Class Leadership and the Allies of the Working Class

The advance to socialism cannot be achieved except under the leadership of the working class. Only the working class has "nothing to lose but its chains", has no share in the means of production. Only the working class has the necessary experience of social production, the necessary organisation and discipline.

In a sense it is easier to see this in a country like Britain with its overwhelmingly proletarian composition, than in a country like Nigeria with its relatively small working class. But, in another sense, it is easy in Britain to misunderstand the meaning of working class leadership. For this does not of necessity arise from numerical superiority. The working class can be dominated by non-working-class ideas, as we know to our cost in Britain. Working class leadership means that the working class that is leading society be imbued with a working class outlook, with a working class philosophy.

If *only* the working class can, in any country, lead the advance to socialism, this advance cannot be the work of the working class *alone*. The working class in its fight against capitalism and for socialism represents the interests of the vast majority of the people, in a sense the future interests of humanity. Imperialism attacks not only the working class but all the "middle sections" of the people—peasants and small farmers, small shopkeepers, intellectuals and technicians (who even if *some of them* can get a well paid status under capitalism find themselves drawn into the attack on their own vocations—education, culture, science for the welfare of man).

The possibility arises of a *durable* alliance of the working class with the middle sections of society, an alliance that is not only *against* imperialism, but lasts throughout the process of building socialism.

Modern imperialism attacks the interests even of a section of the bourgeoisie, who, under certain conditions, can come to see the need to oppose imperialism.

The advance to socialism, therefore, necessitates the *alliance* of the working class with the whole of the working people, and, in so far as circumstances permit, even with a section of the bourgeoisie. The stronger and more clearsighted the leadership of the working class, the greater their own unity, the more firm and broad will be their alliance with the vast majority of the people.

Role of the Communist Party

It is precisely this question of leadership which makes necessary the leadership of the Communist Party in the advance to socialism. The laws of socialist revolution do not operate spontaneously, automatically, like the law of gravity, or other laws of the natural sciences. They demand the *conscious* participation of at least a decisive section of the working class and its allies.

Workers never have and never will come spontaneously to socialist ideas. Living under imperialism, with its school text-books, comics, press, radio, TV, films etc., every worker is subjected day in day out to the outlook of capitalism. A socialist consciousness has to be forged through a combination of continuous explanation, education and experience in struggle, theory alongside practice.

In every country, without exception, the working class and the people need a Party that can at one and the same time:

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"Give the working class and popular movement a socialist consciousness, a scientific theory, a perspective of how to advance to socialism and communism.

"Lead the workers and their allies in all the struggles which confront them—from the immediate struggles under capitalism, right up to the struggle for political power and the building of socialism.

"Provide a disciplined democratic organisation for the vanguard of the working class and working people capable of carrying out these two tasks in continuous struggle."

Without such a Party, based on Marxism-Leninism, which alone provides the necessary clarity and foresight, no advance to socialism can successfully be achieved.

International Working Class Solidarity

Unity and solidarity is an essential part of the working class outlook. The working class exploits no one and cannot benefit from exploitation of others.

Within capitalism antagonism is inevitable not only against the working class and colonial people but between capitalist and capitalist within one country, between the capitalist class of one country and another. Conflict and antagonism is an integral part of imperialism.

But a socialist country can have no antagonism with another socialist country, nor can there be any antagonism between one part of the working class and another within a socialist country. There can be mistakes, sometimes bad mistakes, but these can be and are being remedied; there can be contradictions, differences, but these can be solved by peaceful means.

International solidarity is thus an integral part of the socialist outlook. But the need of international working class solidarity and the solidarity of all working peoples arises, also, from the very nature of the class struggle against imperialism.

The imperialists struggle against their own working class and working people, but they struggle, equally, against the working class and working people of *any country* that secures successes in the fight for socialism. *Imperialism never confines its struggles within its own state frontiers.* The whole of history confirms this.

French and German capitalism made common cause against the Paris Commune. The rival imperialists made common cause time and again against the Chinese democratic revolution. Fourteen capitalist states combined to crush the October Revolution. Every country today fighting for independence and socialism finds itself threatened by the system of war blocs headed by the United States—N.A.T.O., S.E.A.T.O. and the Baghdad Pact.

Thus every working class and people needs in its advance to socialism the help and solidarity of the working class and people of the world. The success of building socialism in the Soviet Union protected China and most of Eastern Europe from full-scale counter-revolutionary attack. It is the strength of the socialist world, with the U.S.S.R. as its centre, that has saved the independence of Egypt and Syria.

Socialism cannot be *imposed* on any country by other socialist countries, but the socialist countries can help to protect them from imperialist aggression (Egypt, Syria, Hungary). No country, in a world still partly dominated by imperialism, can hope successfully to advance to socialism without practising international working class solidarity.

III. THE FORMS OF ADVANCE TO SOCIALISM CHANGE

Without understanding the essential principles of advance to socialism—socialist revolution, dictatorship of the proletariat, socialist construction and planned economy, working class leadership and broad popular alliance, the role of the Communist Party, international working class solidarity —all hopes and aspirations of socialist advance are doomed to defeat.

But, equally, the problem is not solved by a *general* discussion of these principles, and still less by learning them by rote. For all countries the *essence* of the transition to socialism remains the same, but the *forms* change—from country to country and from period to period. Marxism is a creative science, it cannot be learned once and for all. According to what factors do the *forms* of advance to socialism change?

World Relation of Class Forces

We live in *one* world—a world in which, today, capitalism and socialism are co-existent. The form of advance to socialism in any country will depend, in the first place, on the *world relationship of class forces.*

It was hardest of all to be the *first* to make the advance to socialism in the world. *This is a fact that should never be forgotten.* It is easier to make the advance when there is already an established socialist sector in the world. New possibilities of more favourable advance to socialism arise when the world forces of socialism begin to show their visible superiority over the world forces of capitalism. Still more new possibilities may arise when the last sectors of world capitalism are overwhelmingly surrounded by a socialist system which

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has in every way revealed its superiority.

The building of socialism in the U.S.S.R., the world's pioneer in the field, was inevitably coloured by the fact that it was making the first break-through. The historic development of the Russian Revolution was such that in order to survive the people had to build a strong Red Army and security system. If they had not done this, the Revolution would have been crushed. Lenin had striven for a peaceful revolution. Even when it came, the October Revolution was relatively peaceful, but the bitter, ruthless violence came from the side of aggressive imperialism.

Mistakes, it is true, were made. No Communist wishes to condone them. But it is ignorant and hypocritical to divorce these mistakes from the violent conditions of struggle under which they arose.

It was inevitable that the first country to make the break-through had to do so against the concerted ruthlessness of world imperialism. It was this that gave the violent colour to the Russian revolutionary advance; it was this that made more difficult the broad alliance of the people; it was this that gave strength to the character of the White Guard and kulak counter-revolutionary activity. It was in this situation of imperialist aggression that all the political parties other than the Bolsheviks went over to the counter-revolution.

For this reason, whilst the history of the October Revolution and the building of socialism in the U.S.S.R. is a history of the application by the Soviet Communists of the general principles of advance to socialism, it does *not* follow that other countries must follow all the Soviet *forms* of socialist transition.

It was because the Soviet people built socialism *their* way with such brilliant success that the world balance of class forces was so changed, that new *forms* of advance to socialism, more favourable forms, opened up to other countries. Such is the dialectics of history.

It is fashionable in certain circles to praise the Chinese Communists "at the expense of the Russians". But Mao Tse-tung and the Chinese Communists have always been the first to explain that they owe to the Soviet people, in the first place, the more favourable road to socialism that they have been able to take.

The success of building socialism in the U.S.S.R. made wars of intervention against socialism henceforth more difficult. If China and parts of Eastern Europe were spared this it was due to the U.S.S.R. The strength of the socialist sector of the world, along with the deepening general crisis of capitalism (which in part results from the growing strength of socialism) opened up new possibilities to other peoples.

More peaceful roads to socialism became emerged partly through the greater possibility of avoiding interventionary war. The possibility of a multi-party alliance in the transition to socialism, the possibility of more gradual transition in industry and agriculture, the possibility of a broader alliance around the working class arose in the new situation. Modern monopoly capitalism, weakened and turned inwards by the growth of socialism, became more openly reactionary. It thus turned openly against all that was progressive in the earlier days of capitalism—against national sovereignty; against even capitalist democracy; against its own capitalist constitutions; against the materialism and realism that arose with the rising bourgeoisie. The working class comes to the fore as the defenders of sovereignty, democracy, and all that is progressive in the cultural heritage. New possibilities arise for the broad alliance of the great majority of the people around the working class isolating monopoly capitalism. The working class and people of the world, headed by the U.S.S.R., take the fore in the world fight for peace.

In general, because of the U.S.S.R., it is possible for socialist countries to proceed more swiftly with the task of socialist construction.

It was in this new situation in the world, with the new balance of world class forces so much more favourable to socialism, that it was possible for the British Communist Party to formulate the *British Road to Socialism*.

It is as wrong to attack this programme because one does not understand the new relation of world forces that make it possible, as it is wrong to demand that such a programme should have been put forward in the 1920s or 1930s, when the conditions for it had not yet been achieved.

Specific Traditions, Customs, Institutions

But if the *form* of advance to socialism varies with the world relation of class forces, it varies also according to the specific economic development, traditions, customs, institutions of each country.

The speed of economic transition (nationalisation, socialist agriculture etc.) is in part determined by the particular economic development of each country *before* its transition to socialism.

The political form of the dictatorship of the proletariat will be influenced by the earlier political struggles of each country. The character of the broad popular alliance around the working class will depend to some extent on earlier political activities, degree of working class unity, degree of present or former struggle etc.

In countries where there are great traditional Social Democratic parties, much will depend on the degree of working class unity achieved before

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the winning of political power. And the perspective arises of important developments of a left wing within those parties, of achieving national agreements between Communist and Socialist Parties, of joint participation in Socialist Governments pledged to bring about the socialist transformation of the country. But this joint participation in socialist construction will itself depend in the last analysis on the strength of the Communist Party.

Peaceful or Violent?

Communists do not stand for violence as an aim in itself. Indeed it is their hatred of violence that leads them to communism, and their fight for a world where violence will become a thing of history books and museums. Nor are Communists pacifists, because they always have understood that violence may be necessary *against the violence of capitalism and imperialism.*

Violence is an inevitable outcome of capitalism and imperialism. But the growth of the socialist and popular forces in the world has opened up new possibilities (not inevitabilities) of preventing the outbreak of a third world war, and of securing peaceful roads to socialism. To such anti-violent aims Communists exert their every effort.

Violence will come from their (the imperialists) side and not from our (the working class) side. But if it comes it will be met by strength and not by pacifism.

The stronger the working class and its allies, the greater their unity, the more powerful their leadership (in the first place the Communist Parties), the greater the possibility of achieving both peaceful co-existence and the peaceful road to socialism.

The peaceful co-existence of the socialist countries and capitalism does not depend on the absence of struggle, but the contrary. The greater the struggle for peace the greater the possibility of peace. The peaceful road to socialism does not depend on the absence of class struggle, but on the contrary, the greater the struggle before and after the winning of political power, the greater the possibility of achieving a peaceful transition to socialism.

IV. DOGMATISM AND REVISIONISM

Within the ranks of the Communist Parties there is sometimes misunderstanding of the principles of socialist transition. Misconceptions come, above all, from two seemingly opposite sides, that in practice tend to unite—dogmatists and revisionists.

Dogmatism

Dogmatists try to fix and freeze the world, to avoid its richness and complexity, to shut their eyes to change, to what is new, to fresh relations of forces that are continuously arising, and to new possibilities, new *forms* of advance to socialism that flow from them.

They therefore repeat old slogans that history has outdated. There was much dogmatism in the early British Marxists in the S.D.F. and S.L.P. "Capitalism would fall by itself"; the fight on immediate issues was "patching up capitalism"; specific problems of Britain were often neglected; the conscious role of the Party was often belittled.

Dogmatism in our present day means a refusal to study the new forces in the world, the new relations of forces and the new possibilities that arise from them. It is often revealed in fixing or freezing the Labour Party as if it were incapable of change and identifying it with the right-wing reformists that dominate it.

Dogmatism means seeing only the laws of socialist revolution *in the abstract* without applying them to the new position in the world and to the specific peculiarities of each country.

Revisionism

But the main danger in the international Communist movement today, including Britain, lies in revisionism.

There is a reason for this danger; it is not a quirk or accident of history. It has grown in a period of prolonged full employment under capitalism in the special post-war position. A certain softening in the class struggle on economic issues led to a certain softening of ideological outlook. Certain comrades tended "to come to terms with capitalism".

Revisionism means keeping a cover, facade, of Marxist terminology, whilst removing the essence of a Marxist-Leninist outlook. It was strengthened by the revelation at the Twentieth Congress of the C.P.S.U. of some profound mistakes that had been committed. The revelation of the mistakes, and of the measures taken to correct them, were, *in fact,* a profound symbol of the correctness of Marxist-Leninist principles.

But a number of comrades confused the mistakes with the principles, and in a moment of half-panic began to throw out the principles when they should have been throwing out the mistakes and strengthening their understanding of the principles.

Thus some forgot the class struggle; some forgot that the state was a *capitalist* state; some threw out the dictatorship of the proletariat; others rejected proletarian internationalism or forgot the role of the Communist Party. Some, in "the name of freedom", came to terms with bourgeois dictatorship; others, in "the name of integrity", lost their socialist integrity. Some "in the

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name of principle" forgot their principles, and produced an emasculated Marxism, whisky without the alcohol, that approximated more and more to reformism and liberalism.

Conclusion

If the essential principles of the advance to socialism be abandoned, the possibility of successfully advancing to socialism is abandoned along with it.

But to apply Marxist-Leninist principles in a creative way means taking into account the relationship of world class forces at any time and what is specific, particular in any country.

If the correct approach is understood, there have never been such opportunities as exist in Britain today.

The world is *visibly* in transition to socialism. Socialist superiority to capitalism is no longer beneath the surface but is *visibly* showing itself before our eyes.

The opportunity is before us of bringing about what Marx and Engels always saw as the historic "wedding" that would make the British working class invincible, the marriage, the unity of the mass organisations (so traditionally strong in Britain) with socialist theory (so long so weak). And this demands deep discussion inside the movement of the problems of transition to socialism.

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Politics and the Poet

Jack Lindsay

THE Renegadism or Turncoating of the Lake Poets, who were the vanguard Romantic poets of the 1790's, has long been seen to raise in a crucial form the question of Poetry's relation to Politics. Browning's poem fixed the idea of Wordsworth as the Lost Leader; but critics like Hazlitt had raised it much earlier and the revival of political radicalism among the poets such as Byron, Shelley, Keats, of the post-Wordsworth generation had thrown into strong relief the retreat of the Lake Poets. Thus, Crabb Robinson in 1826 complained of Wordsworth's "moral and intellectual suicide". Now Professor Todd has written in *Politics and the Poet** a book that says something like the last word on the factual evidences for Wordsworth's positions. Apart from valuable new material about the poet's youthful connections, this study importantly shows how deep his early radicalism went and how stubbornly fought-out was the retreat. And the result is both a new insight into his poetry and into the general issues of the relation of poetry and life.

Born in 1770, Wordsworth, with three brothers and a sister, was left an orphan when his father died in 1785. Among relations at Penrith he was made to feel inferior and dependent; and he was embittered by the way in which the Earl of Lonsdale cheated the family out of £5,000 due to the father, his employee. Professor Todd shows in detail how William at Cambridge was one of the extreme radical group, turning to the Jacobin poets like Charlotte Smith. In 1791, before leaving for his visit to France, he called on that poetess at Brighton where (her sister wrote) she had "formed acquaintance with some of the violent advocates of the French Revolution, and unfortunately caught the contagion." He got from her a letter to the Jacobin poetess Helen Maria Williams, who had gone to stay in France. At Blois he came strongly under the influence of the revolutionary patriot Beaupuy (who reappears later as one of the models for the Happy Warrior). The invasion of Savoy, which upset Burns, was for him only "the emancipation of 'the slave of slaves'." On his return home he handed his poems to Johnson, whom the Tory *Anti-Jacobin Review* called "the favourite publisher and friend of the Priestleys, the Darwins, the Godwins, and other *unprejudiced* authors": to which list we may add the names of Blake and Paine. He was also friendly with the editors of the Whig-Radical *Morning Chronicle*. He was fiercely against the war with France (which incidentally was cutting him off from Annette whom he had got with child at Blois). He was powerfully moved by Godwin's *Political Justice* (February 1793) and drew on that book as on Paine's writings for his reply to the Bishop of Llandaff's *Strictures on the French Revolution*, printed with the sermon *The Wisdom and Goodness of God in having made both Rich and Poor;* but the element in him that shrank from conflict prevented him from publishing his essay. However, he declared that he considered political enquiry "the most fruitful field of human knowledge."

Wordsworth and France

The Terror did not shake him; he was staunch in support of the members of the Corresponding Society in their trials for treason in 1794; and as late as 1797 a spy, reporting on the household at Stowe, assumed that he was well known to the Government as a suspected character. "The inhabitants of Alfoxton House are a set of violent Democrats." But he was beginning to grow worried about developments in France. His play *The Borderers* attempted to bring out the complexity of issues, the way in which the best of intentions could be perverted and in which abstract principles, not fully based in experience, could turn into their opposites. He still however blamed any bad proceedings in France on the attacks and pressures of the encircling reactionary forces. He kept seeking to show in his poems the courage and humanity of the poor and oppressed; his thesis that the language of poetry should be that of the middle and lower classes derived from his sense of solidarity with those classes. His brother admitted:

> "He entertained little reverence for ancient institutions as such; and he felt little sympathy with the higher classes of society. He was deeply impressed with a sense of the true dignity of the lower orders, and their sufferings; and his design was to endeavour to recover for them the rights

* F. M. Todd—*Politics and the Poet—a Study of Wordsworth*—Methuen 25s.

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> of the human family, and the franchise of universal brotherhood, of which . . . they had been robbed by the wealthy, the noble and the few."

Drawing away from France, he visited Germany with Coleridge, hoping to find signs of a strong brotherly movement there, but was horrified: "Money, money is here the God of universal worship." England began to seem not so bad a place after all. In *Resolution and Independence* the poet saw the leech-gatherer as "carrying with him his own fortitude, and the necessities which an unjust state of society has entailed upon him"; but his angers were weakening. The events of 1800-2 made him feel, with Coleridge and Southey, the need to turn his attention more to the home-situation. He considered that the advocates of reform had no true feeling for their own people, that they idealised France and Napoleon, and that their roots in national life had been cut. Still, he earnestly looked to Fox as the political leader who could actualise the aims set out in his poems.

The turning-point came when Napoleon invaded Switzerland in 1802. He felt that France was now simply an aggressive power, and he wanted a people's war against her. He still distrusted the Tories and hated having to look to them for leadership in such a war. Two events, however, had a decisive effect. The death of his brother John at sea in 1805 and the uprising of the Spanish people against the French invaders in 1808. In his noble tract on the Convention of Cintra he set out his conception of a war of liberation, in which the struggle against Napoleon would be linked with a forward social programme. (On this basis he completed his fine sonnets on Freedom.) In 1809 his rich friend Beaumont felt it necessary to caution his guests against the poet's "democratic principles".

Contradictions

But his sense of insoluble contradictions in the historical process was weighing him down. He began to reject struggle against an "unjust state of society." Because he could not understand the new forces at work, he shrank from the violence appearing in the Burdett riots, in Luddite protests, in the assassination of the Prime Minister Perceval. He had now grown friendly with some well-off cultured Tories like Beaumont and Lord Lonsdale. Lonsdale offered him a property worth £1,000, which he refused; but, six years later in 1812, in worsening circumstances, he applied to the Lord for a Government job and was appointed a Distributor of Stamps. At the same time he was turning towards the Church of England and religious consolations. Even so, he sent a copy of his works to Leigh Hunt when in jail for libelling the Prince Regent and in 1816 contributed sonnets to Hunt's *Examiner* and the liberal *Champion*. But all the while he was steadily succumbing to fear of the new forces at work in the social and political fields; he renounced his belief that it was "derogatory to human nature to set up Property in preference to Person, as a title for legislative power." He distrusted the reform movement and could not see what measures would help in such a complicated situation:

> "It is hard to look upon the condition in which so many of our fellow creatures are born, but they are not to be raised from it by partial and temporary expedients. . . . Circumstances have forced this nation to do, by its manufactures, an undue proportion of the dirty and unwholesome work of the globe. The revolutions among which we have lived have unsettled the value of all kinds of property, and of labour, the most precious of all, to that degree that misery and privation are frightfully prevalent. We must bear the sight of this, and endure its pressure, till we have by reflection discovered the cause, and not till then can we hope even to palliate the evil. It is a thousand to one but that the means resorted to will aggravate it."

Politics and Poetry

His uncertainty and caution now led him to oppose or at least deprecate all progressive policies, which seemed to him only to intensify the grip of the new dehumanising money forces. Yet, in 1836, some verses of his satirise the Canutes who try to halt the ocean of progress; and something of the old radical flickered up with the rise of Chartism. "I have no respect whatever for the Whigs, but I have a good deal of the Chartist in me." Also, he expressed enthusiasm for the Italian struggle for independence.

Even this rough summary shows how prolonged and deep-going was the political struggle in Wordsworth, and how essential is an understanding of that struggle for a penetration into his poetry. The obtuseness still prevalent, however, on such issues among our intellectuals may be gauged by the review of Professor Todd's book in *The New Statesman*:

> "Politics, even in the widest sense, were a very small part of the man—of the grim old insomniac. . . . The craft of verse and Christianity, with interplay of pride ('I have no need of a Redeemer') and humility, are the important things." (J. Johns).

An assessment that gives the lie direct to the poet's own statement in 1833 that he had allotted "twelve hours' thought to the conditions and prospects of society, for one to poetry." In fact his political attitudes entered into every line he

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wrote, and determined the whole direction of his poetic development. And our comprehension of this relation between his political positions and his poetic activity is not only crucial for our enjoyment and analysis of his poetry; it also throws an illuminating ray on the inner conflicts of all the most significant modern poets—on the "depoliticising" of Baudelaire by the defeat of the revolution in 1848, as on the confusions and flights brought about among our own writers by the events of 1939 or the post-1945 Cold War. It is worth while then to discuss Wordsworth's inner conflict for the issues that it raises and the relation of those issues to our own world.

1. He lost his grip because he could not sustain in his poetic definitions the strong sense he had of the contradictions of his epoch. We cannot of course ask him to rise to the perspective of the French Revolution which has been made possible by the events of 1848, 1871 and 1917. But what we can ask is that he should have held fast to his deepest sense of what was humanly at stake, that he should have continued to fight for a poetic grasp of the struggle which he felt so intensely going on all around him. Blake sustained this sort of poetic penetration, and Keats was beginning to make it with great profundity, so that we are not asking the impossible of Wordsworth.

2. He at first made a strenuous effort to understand and incorporate in his thinking the most advanced theoretical views available in the revolutionary situation of the 1790's—the views of Godwin and Paine. He drew powerfully on what was humanly valid in them, and he reacted against what was abstract, rigid, mechanist; he began to feel his way into distinguishing what truly advanced the cause of freedom and brotherhood, and what was a confused "liberalism" using fine phrases only to intensify the capitalist controls breaking up the "natural bonds" of love and brotherhood, and furthering the exploitation and thingification of men. In his reaction against the elements of falsity he found himself driven towards Burke, the conservative expounder of tradition and of the need to accept gratefully the rich diversity of existence; he felt compelled to choose between conservative acceptance of life and doctrinaire theorisings which, behind the thesis of human perfectibility, seemed only to help the money-forces of exploitation and dehumanisation.

3. For the same reasons he felt compelled to choose between a hypocritical liberalism which had no feeling for the people whom it sought to mobilise for its limited aims of class advancement, and a patriotism with Burkean roots. The internationalism which he had admired in the Corresponding Society had somehow become a cheat; and an un-English idealisation of a foreign power, France, seemed to leave him no choice but a recognition of the Tories as the inheritors, however unsatisfactory, of national pride and independence. Doctrinaire theorising was felt to be one with the failure to enter into the people and to love the national tradition.

Wordsworth and the People

4. This unresolved conflict of his entered into his conception of the People. He opposed the Dalesmen, the Statesmen, of his early years in Cumberland and Westmorland, to the emerging proletariat. (The speed of change in his period is shown by the fact that whereas at the time of the *Lyrical Ballads,* there were twice as many country labourers as town workers, by the time of the Reform Bill the situation was reversed; towns like Manchester and Leeds had almost tripled their population.) Here is the point at which his break from reality asserted itself most strongly; and since Professor Todd ignores it, it is worth some detailed notice. In his letters to Fox and Poole he declares that with factories, workhouses and soup-kitchens the home-affections have decayed; *Michael* and *The Brothers* were written to dramatise the dispossession of the small farmer by the (vaguely defined) money-forces. He thus was defending a way of life based on the peasant and the craftsman, on *"landed* property, including the feelings of inheritance, homes, and personal and family independence." But he seems to have known little, and to have clouded what he did know, of the farmers of his region. All the evidence goes to show that the Cumbrian farmers held by the copyholds common in customary tenures all over England—though he once wrote "our land is, far more than elsewhere tilled by men who are the Owners of it." Feudal charges "galled and fettered" the yeoman, says W. Marshall in *The Review and Abstract of the County Reports to the Board of Agriculture,* York, 1813. Other contemporary writers called the tenure of the Cumbrians a state of slavery and bondage, a reminder of vassalage, and a species of feudal oppression (J. Donaldson in *Modern Agriculture,* 1796, and J. Britton and E. Brayley in *Cumberland,* 1802). The oppressors were, however, not the new industrialists, but the Tory landlords whom Wordsworth had come to revere, the Lowthers, Howards, Tuftons, Wyndhams, Grahams, Lawsons, Flemings and Curwens.

Thus, at Rydal, where he had moved by 1813, three-quarters of the original customary land had

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been consolidated in four farms and the rest had reverted to demesne; by the mid-nineteenth century all the customary land was in demesne.* But, having taken his stand, Wordsworth remained blind to the actuality about him. Harriet Martineau commented on his almost total isolation from what was happening close at hand:

> "I, deaf, can hardly conceive how he with eyes & ears & a heart which leads him to converse with the poor in his incessant walks can be so unaware of their social state. . . Here vice is flagrant beyond anything I ever could have looked for . . . drunkenness quarrels & extreme licentiousness with women—here is dear good old W. for ever talking of rural innocence and deprecating any intercourse with towns lest the purity of his neighbours should be corrupted."

He had set up in his mind as absolute categories the pre-capitalist farm life and the town life of the emerging proletariat; and he dared not look outside his own mind. The proletariat, torn from the soil, appeared to him as the instruments of capitalism, contaminated by the system that engulfed them. So he opposed to his Faith in the People his Fear of the Proletariat.

Nature and Religion

5. His sympathy for the downtrodden was thus perverted into an acceptance of the system that provoked by its cruelties the fortitude and steadfast love of the humble. He had come round to the Bishop of Llandaff's position, which had once seemed a blasphemy. Hence the deepening significance of his views on Nature. The people of the industrial towns had lost Nature; their characters could not be formed by the natural "images of danger, melancholy, and grandeur, or loveliness, softness, and ease." The bond of man and man was broken, and men were being subjected to all sorts of distorting pressures. The expropriated masses, deprived of "natural" bonds, could only become a destructive force, blindly upheaving against the blind mechanism that dehumanised them. The Return to Nature became a safeguard against Revolution, which now represented not the "very heaven" of his youth, but the ferocity of a shorn Samson crashing down the pillars of things. All the weak frightened elements of his character coalesced to repudiate development through struggle. (J. S. Mill saw the fundamental implication of his poetry as the rejection of "struggle or imperfection". This is true of the Message that emerges, but not true of what remains vital in his poetry, as we shall see later.)

6. Now religion came forward to justify the rejection of struggle and to lift all his conceptions to a sphere outside action, to a meditation of the poet alone with Nature or God. His brother's death by shipwreck had done much to begin this retreat within himself; and we can perhaps now best come to grips with what happened to his poetry during the complex struggle which we have outlined, by considering the poem which most powerfully utters his emotion over that loss: *Elegiac Stanzas Suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle in a Storm, painted by Sir George Beaumont.* Here, looking concretely at the conflict rending his being, we can estimate both his achievement and his failure in artistic terms.

In the opening lines he recalls living near the scene that is depicted. Everything then was peaceful and hopeful, the castle image trembling in the calm water. A scene that could have evoked: "The light that never was, on sea or land, The consecration, and the Poet's dream." "A picture had it been of lasting ease, Elysian quiet, without toil or strife." Only the gentle movement of elemental forces. And in the picture he would have "seen the soul of truth in every part; A faith, a trust, that could not be betrayed." (Thus he defines his early Utopian attitude when revolutionary France was "standing on the top of golden hours, and human nature seeming born again.") But now that picture is obliterated. "A power is gone, which nothing can restore; a deep distress hath humanised my soul." In the smiling sea he beholds the treacherous storm that wrecks the ship of man, while the Castle, "cased in th'unfeeling armour of old time," rides safely above.† The dream of beauty and peace now seems a limited egoism. Having been drawn down deep into human suffering, he sees a different world.

* Between 1806-20 the Flemings won cases against tenants who had refused to pay a huge general fine of forty times the yearly rent, which was levied at the death of Sir Michael Fleming. For the status of the Statesmen, see W. W. Douglas, *Science and Society*, xii (1948) 387 ff.

† It is perhaps no accident that the painting is the work of his rich patron or that the castle of power alone outrides the storm of change—though the poet in Wordsworth sees it not as a beneficent thing but as closed in "unfeeling armour," resisting the blow that humanises. Further we must see the poem as belonging to the very wide series of poems and images (inaugurated largely by Falconer's *Shipwreck*) in which the sense of social cataclysm draws on Wreck or Storm for symbols of commercial and imperial doom (the retort of outraged Nature). Turner's seascapes, with their culmination in the Wreck of the Slaveship, belong to the same development. (Ruskin's magnificent passage on that picture had a potent effect on the young William Morris.)

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But welcome fortitude, and patient cheer,
And frequent sights of what is to be borne!
Such sights, or worse, as are before me here.
Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

The poem thus powerfully expresses the dialectics of growth. Utopian dream and harsh reality clash, and out of loss is born a deepened sense of union. One hope is broken, but a stronger hope is born, able to endure. As poet, Wordsworth reaches down below the terms in which he is analysing his changing loyalties; he creates a richly evocative pattern of change and development. (The core of the struggle then lies in what he is to make of the deepened "hope"—whether he is to root it in earth or divert it on to God.)

So we find that when we turn to the poetry the issues grow much more involved and subtle than the direct political analysis suggests. That analysis was correct enough in showing that finally Wordsworth receded from reality too far to remain a true poet; but it merely affords us a set of signposts for exploring the poems in which he continues concretely to struggle with the situation and to seek the human clue amid a baffling tumult of forces.

Nature and Human Change

We can now proceed to do more justice to his idea of Nature. That idea enabled him to complete his "moral and intellectual suicide," but it also lay at the heart of his creativeness. To deal with it adequately we should have to discuss at length the way in which the Romantics from Thomson's *Winter* onwards had sought to find in men's relation to Nature the clue to the deep changes going on in social relationships, in culture, in the political struggle. Briefly we may say that the moments of comprehensive change in "the Face of Nature" were taken as images of human change—the moments of Dawn and Dusk, of Storm and Moonrise. The Return to Nature was seen as a tryst with one's deeper self, away from a corrupted world; as the moment of dialectical change; a withdrawal that was inverted into a sense and a need of fuller union; a test of truth and falsity; a refuge and a flight, but also a source of purifying energies that could flow back into the social sphere as revolt and finally revolution. (That culmination occurred in Blake.)

Wordsworth from *Tintern Abbey* to *The Excursion* struggled with this great surge of explosive imagery, which is one of the great contributions of our poetry to world-culture. In many ways he stabilised and extended it; and his magnificent achievement in this field cannot be understood apart from the stubborn political conflict which Professor Todd had set out. His weaknesses as well as his strength entered into it; but on the positive side there was a continual triumph of the dialectical grasp which we have seen in little in the *Elegiac Stanzas*. Perhaps we can summarise his particular contribution best by pointing to *The Prelude* and the way in which he there clarifies and develops the idea of a necessary return-to-nature at each moment of crucial change in the individual, each nodal point of dialectical growth and expression of social being. Nature thus ceases to be a mere maternal bosom of repose or a blind set of elemental forces, and is truly humanised. The poet's weakness in trying to limit the ultimate basis of these moments of realised union to an economy of peasant-crafts and to the relations of love and fellowship flowing from such a basis, cannot in the last resort destroy the deep truth of his vision, his imagery. In a sense the new relations of the industrial world come into the picture, since they constitute the pressure of fear and loss that lends urgency to the poet's need for love and brotherhood, for human wholeness.

Development and Inner Conflict

Now let us glance back at the main points I made about Wordsworth's development and its inner conflict. It becomes clear that though he made some bad mistakes the conflict was fruitful as long as it maintained real links with the condition of the people, with the ordeals and pangs that followed their loss of the land. Long after the poet in his conscious mind had renounced struggle a deep struggle went on in his writings. But the renunciation was not therefore meaningless; it pointed to the limitations in his understanding of what was happening to people—limitations which carried certain flaws, vaguenesses and flatnesses, through his work from the beginning, and which increased inhibitions as time went on, finally destroying his creativeness altogether.

We may then generalise that the extent to which a poet's conscious political views help him towards a real grasp of the contradictions of his epoch and of the essence of what is happening to people, they are a necessary part of his creative mechanism. There is no substitute for them. The more fully he understands the nature of development through struggle in all its aspects, the better poet he is going to be. (I use the term *understanding* not simply of his analysis of things, but rather of his total comprehension, which is concrete and immediate as well as analytical.)

The poet feels the need of absorbing the most advanced theoretical analysis of his day; but by

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his nature he will react against all that is mechanistic and oversimplified in them. Wordsworth could never have developed as a poet without Godwin and Paine, both through the enlargement of his perspectives that they brought about, and through his reaction against all that was rigid and abstract in their formulations. He sought to fill the gaps and interstices with his poetic intuition; and where he failed in this effort, he fell back on God, on Nature as an idealist principle, on a repudiation of struggle.

In all these matters we have problems that are with us still and that will continue in one shape or another as far as we can foresee. Today Marxism provides the vanguard theoretical analysis of what is happening to our societies, our peoples. And so far as it fails in its high task of creating a new sort of unitary dialectical consciousness, it reveals doctrinaire and abstract elements, ideological ossifications, against which the poet must react. Similarly, in so far as Marxists have failed to resolve the issue of international solidarity and national tradition, they create afresh something of the quandary of Wordsworth in the years round 1802-08.

The Poet and Marxism

Not that I suggest it is possible to transpose mechanically the problems of one age into another age. To ensure that a mechanical transposition is not made we must relate each phase of revolutionary thought to the forms of social conflict from which it arises, and we must realise the ways in which both its strengths and its weaknesses express the degree of historical development reached, the degree of development in people. Thus, the gap between Godwin's thought and the actual level of culture in the emerging proletariat in his day is the measure of his abstractions and inadequacies; and the confused struggle in Wordsworth has a real relation to the sufferings and pangs of consciousness in the dispossessed people looking back to a life on the land, which they inevitably idealise—the sort of thing that carried on all through the Chartist years and begot the land-schemes of settlement.

In our own day, socialism has been achieved over a large part of the earth and Marxism has there become the form of thought through which development is realised. The working-out of Marxism is thus inseparably welded with the forward movement of the peoples in the socialist countries; and this produces both a massive force and a series of acute problems for the free and full working out that we are only beginning to realise.* The fact that Marxism in its essential ideas and methods cannot come into conflict with the needs of brotherhood or the liberation of the creative faculty must not blind us to the fact that particular applications can, and often have done so. We have yet to embody this sort of problem in our thinking. How was the writer, struggling to be true to the full human situation, to react and express himself in a situation where Marxism became sadly narrowed or distorted as, for instance, under Rakosi in Hungary, or in the days of the "No-Conflict Theory" in the U.S.S.R.? These are very real issues; for it seems unlikely that in the struggle to develop socialism into communism there can be other than a continual tension between inadequate formulations and the expanding forces and possibilities of life. One way or another we will have this sort of problem with us at least until the advent of world communism. I do not think there is any easy answer; but unless we have the issue steadily in our minds we are going to increase mistakes instead of working towards solutions.

One way of working towards solutions is to deepen in any and every way understanding of the creative process and of the relation of Politics and Poetry. The coming-of-age of socialism in the U.S.S.R. has brought these matters urgently on to the agenda of history. That is why I said that Professor Todd's book was welcome because, in enabling us to get at closer grips with Wordsworth's success and failure through his political ideas, it helps us to clarify our own cultural problems today.

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* I do not mean that Marxism in countries still capitalist has no part to play; there too there is the same link between theoretical levels and national development, though complicated by the class-struggle. The same conflict exists between creative and dead or doctrinaire formulations.

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Marxism and the Moral Law

Dr. John Lewis

IN his recent book *Why I am not a Christian* Bertrand Russell discusses the grounds and validity of moral judgment. He says that some things are morally right and some morally wrong just as some things are blue and some are yellow. He holds these judgments to be absolute. He offers no ground for this conviction other than his own powerful subjective feeling, or moral intuition that it is so. Elsewhere he elaborates this somewhat. "Since no way can be even imagined for deciding a difference as to values, the conclusion is forced upon us that the difference is one of tastes, not one as to any objective truth." When we make such a judgment "we are giving expression to our own emotion, not to a fact that would still be true if our personal feelings were different."

In point of fact while reflection or theory forces Russell to this position, it is not one that he is at all consistent about. He constantly assumes in his writing on social issues a belief in the validity of the moral ideals which should guide history, he clearly holds the view that his moral judgments are superior to those of the movements and men he unsparingly condemns. He would not for a moment, *in practice,* concede that cruelty is wrong for him, but right for someone else. He says that since the age of thirty-eight he has been committed to such values as freedom, happiness, kindness and justice, and *not* as mere personal tastes, but as modes of behaviour which he feels everyone *ought* to follow and which he will roundly condemn when departed from.

What this means is that Russell accepts these standards as universal, absolute and authoritative, but does so purely on the basis of subjective feeling.

Reviewing this book in the *Observer,* Philip Toynbee says, "If one is convinced that cruelty is absolutely wrong, and not because it detracts, in the long run, from the greatest happiness of the greatest number, then it is hard to see where this absolute comes from unless from something or someone outside and superior to ourselves." Now while the condemnation of cruelty is to the general advantage, I agree that we do not condemn it for that reason. We condemn it, for instance, if practised against ourselves. We do *feel* it, in every individual instance, to be wrong in itself. Now, why? Does that moral judgment require authenticating from outside human experience, does it necessarily imply "something or someone outside and superior to ourselves"? Kingsley Martin agrees with Toynbee and in the *New Statesman* calls for "the justification of his (Russell's) humanist faith" and calls for a solution to the problem of "the origin and justification of" faith in good.

This is not a purely speculative question for Marxists, because their own refusal to accept any transcendental standard for ethics and their assertion that morals are strictly relative to social conditions and change with them, is the reason for the strong ethical condemnation of Marxism. In fact it is this ethical objection which is one of the most influential and strongly felt. The most powerful motives among men are moral motives. Moral enthusiasm, moral repudiation and indignation are the driving force of history and that is why they are mobilised in full force against Communism.

Critics of Marxism

It is therefore asserted that since Marxists admit of no other morality than that relative to the political victory of the working class they have in fact repudiated morality and discarded all regard for human life and other human values.

Some critics are fair enough to recognise that none the less Marxists do assert that their aims are higher than those of their opponents, but they hold this to be completely inconsistent with an avowed class morality, since there is no outside standard whereby to make this judgment. Merely to make one's own interests the standard of moral judgment is obviously unethical, as we all see it would be if slave-owners made their interests the sole criterion of right and wrong. If working class interests are more moral than owning class interests it is not just because they are *our* interests and we are determined to have it so. There must be a reason, a moral ground, other than the fact that it is *our* interests we are concerned with. This is a perfectly fair argument. There must be such a ground. What is it? And if we affirm some moral ideal such as "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" as the ground, what is the ground of that ground? Or is it sufficient to say with Russell—I feel it in my bones and that is an end of it? If that is not

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sufficient are we required to find "something or someone outside and superior to ourselves" to justify this standard?

Criticism can be carried one stage further. If the only valid moral criterion is the political victory of the working class, then whatever conduces to that victory is legitimate, the end justifies any means. The only escape from such a position would be the acceptance of standards of right and wrong *independent* of class interests, which might preclude the use of certain measures in attaining socialist ends. But by definition there are no other standards, the *only* standard of right is victory and therefore everything that leads to victory must be right.

Basis of Right and Wrong

Now in considering these criticisms what we have to decide first is what is the basis of right and wrong. Before we state the Marxist view, let us look at the alternatives.

First of all then, Russell's simple assertion that he *feels* cruelty, or whatever it might be, to be absolutely wrong. Without disputing his judgment, is his moral intuition, his feeling that this is as certain as that blue is blue, this verdict of his conscience, adequate ground for accepting such a judgment? Obviously not, as Russell himself sees, for it only tells us something about Russell's own feelings and, as he says, what he feels cannot be, just because he feels it, authoritative for anyone else. This is obscured when we take as our example something we generally agree about, but even if a sadist says that he has no feeling of repulsion about cruelty, *our* feeling of repulsion has not the slightest authority for him. In point of fact once we step outside generally accepted ideas of right and wrong, conscience and feelings do most violently clash—conviction about race superiority for instance, or the right to unearned income, or pacifism. Since Russell finds himself refusing to allow to others the right to judge as right what he judges as wrong, and this is what he does when he condemns all sorts of things which to other people seem right, or approves what they condemn, he has obviously abandoned his own criterion, and so does everybody else sooner or later.

Are we compelled to say then that this judgment derives its validity from "something or someone outside of and superior to ourselves"? Russell himself has answered this in the very book which Toynbee reviewed (but obviously Toynbee never read that essay!) It has also been answered many times before and is, in fact, an exploded fallacy. How are we to judge whether the authority for a moral law is superior to us, for only if he is can we assert that authority? On moral grounds, of course, because He, God, is good. In that case either we know what good is before we judge that God is good and therefore accept his authority, or we say that He is good because there is no standard of right other than what he commands, which is arguing in a circle.

In point of fact the argument itself bears witness to the fact that we are dealing with two separate things—God and goodness, and attributing goodness to God. In other words goodness must have a meaning independent of God. The same argument holds of any Abstract Principle, or Moral Law. We accept it because we judge it to be right. We cannot accept it just because it is imposed upon us. Mere force or non-moral authority has no power to *make* anything right.

This is a very old question. It was first asked by Plato in the *Euthyphro*: "Is it right because the gods command it, or do the gods command it because it is right?"

Of course our very ethical agnostics are in this matter more orthodox than Christian theology, which whatever its faults, is pretty good on pure logic (because they learned it from Aristotle), for the church holds that moral distinctions are antecedent to the divine commandments. Right is not right because God wills it, but God wills it because it is right. This must be very disappointing to Mr. Toynbee.

What then *is* the basis of right? Let us try again. Is it as the Utilitarians and the French *philosophes* said, *just whatever conduces to human happiness*? *Is it just self-interest*? Certainly not. Because we know perfectly well that it is not always right to do what we please. Pleasure and duty are not, unfortunately, always the same thing. Right too often requires us to run counter to our personal interests, to contradict our impulses, to face all sorts of deprivations and unpleasantness.

Is it then *the greatest happiness of the greatest number*? But why should I concern myself with other people's happiness? Why subordinate my interests to the common good? An ideal that transcends actual interests is nobody's business. A general good is not necessarily good for me.

If a man simply refuses to accept the obligation to sacrifice himself for the common good, there is no *reason* why he should.

The argument assumes of course that individual happiness is desirable and is what all have a right to seek. Therefore the most satisfactory state of affairs is when we are all happy. But this is no reason for my sacrificing my happiness that others may be happy, for, by definition, the only good

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thing is individual happiness. "From each for self to each for all there is no road."

The Good and the Morally Right

We had better start again, and let us do so by drawing a distinction between what is good, valuable, desirable, and what is morally right. Lots of things are good, and it may also be right that we should have them, but not necessarily. Health and food and shelter and love and friendship and holidays and nice clothes are good and it is right that I should have them. Here good and obligation coincide. But under certain circumstances I may feel it my duty to forgo something that is good. I may sacrifice my legitimate pleasures to satisfy the needs of my family, or in the service of a cause.

It is extremely important to start off by recognising that the good is nothing abstract but just everything that satisfies human needs and desires from simple things such as we have mentioned to all those new and growing needs like television sets, washing machines and Continental holidays. There are things that we want, sometimes individually, and sometimes, like dancing and holidays, along with other people. The only criterion of goodness here is that we want them. As the philosopher Spinoza said, "We do not desire things because they are good, they are good because we desire them." We do not need to find any other reason for choosing such things other than the mere fact that we do choose them. Good things are by definition those things that we choose, that we prefer.

And here we have, as we have already noted, the first kind of *obligation*. A man has a duty to himself. A man has a *right* to these things and he ought to feel very strongly about it and not let anyone cheat him of them. He ought to fight for what is good and defend his goods. And all that is highly ethical.

But important and fundamental though this is we have not yet come to the *heart* of the moral problem, and that, of course, is the kind of obligation that constrains us to forgo these legitimate desires. On the firm basis that we have laid down, *why should I forgo anything*?

It has been widely believed that I must do so in deference to certain general moral principles, but it is precisely the authority and validity of such principles that are in question. In fact it must be conceded that no such principles exist independent of and prior to experience. If we recognise them it is because we have ourselves formulated them on the basis of human experience. Whatever authority they have is therefore based on human experience. They certainly come to be felt as self-existent and transcendent and immutable, but they are not, and all sorts of difficulties and mistakes follow the belief that they are.

This means that the obligation to restrain our natural impulses and forgo our legitimate desires arises from social experience. Exactly how this happens is a matter of great importance for (*a*) it shows *how* the *authority* of morality arises, (*b*) *how far* that authority goes and when it ceases, and (*c*) why it has such a powerful influence on the mind, why it is *felt* intuitively as *a categorical imperative*.

The answer to this problem is to be found in anthropology and psychology. Two sciences with which moral philosophers are seldom acquainted, hence their inadequate treatment of this, the crucial question of ethics.

Quite simply, as human society develops it does so in certain specific and highly complex forms. In any primitive community we find a set of institutions, special forms of production and exchange, marriage customs, intricate and detailed procedures and rules and taboos, fixed habits and traditions.[1]

Social Experience

These methods of living, traditions and institutions impose on the members of the community a whole range of obligations which are strongly impressed upon all by the tremendous force of tradition. Tribal life is thus very authoritative and compulsive and various ceremonial and ritual means are adopted strongly to impress these customs and obligations on members of the tribe. Magic, religion, taboo, totemism, tribal ritual, fertility, marriage and initiation rites all strongly impress the imagination so that a feeling of authority and sanctity, of categorical obligation is created and built up within the mind of each individual. He is thus constrained by an overwhelming feeling that he *must* obey these rules and he feels terribly guilty if he does not. The psychologist calls this social conditioning, the Freudian speaks of the creation of a super-ego, we call it conscience or moral intuition, it is all the same thing.

[1] All this has been described with great wealth of detail for a large number of primitive communities by anthropologists intimately acquainted with them through long residence in their midst and familiarity with the language. However different these customs are, and they are widely different, each is a viable, interconnected system of social life which maintains itself successfully. Space forbids a catalogue of such studies.

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The same social pressure gradually turns an amoral child into a more or less responsible member of society. Social pressure at work, in the family, in school, in the profession, in the ship or regiment or factory, effects the same social conditioning. Thus arises the sense of obligation which may, if of the *first order,* represent a powerful social drive to attain goods for ourselves, individually or collectively; these we call our *rights* and they have powerful ethical force. If they are of the *second* order they impose restraints compelling us to forgo these things in the interests of society, of others; these we call our *duties.*

Strong feelings of moral obligation are thus engendered backed up by social approval and disapproval, embodied in fixed habits, rules, actual laws and finally finding expression in codes of morals, precepts, sermons, stories, plays, poems, dramas, pictures, which powerfully reinforce them.

The appearance of this moral-complex of ideas and institutions is effected by evolutionary pressure. A community thus welded together in mutual support, with strong feelings of social obligation, with powerful restraints on sex, on violence, on covetousness and indiscipline, with firm family regulations and marriage customs has considerable survival value.

This reduction of the complex problem of morality to the simpler forms found in primitive society is instructive. It shows three things:

1. That the basis of all morality is the satisfaction of human needs, *in society,* by the working of disciplined social institutions.
2. All moral obligations thus have *a rational basis,* for every individual profits by the successful working of society and by the duties and restraints imposed upon its members.
3. But this does not mean that the rational perception of this general utility would in itself be enough to make a man do his duty. Only intense social conditioning and the building up of *character* and an integral personal ideal or ego ideal, an organised and integrated personality,[1] will suffice for that. And so there emerges the tremendous compulsion of moral principle which can lead men to acts of heroic self-sacrifice, to the faithful and onerous performance of daily duty.

Social Needs and Moral Obligations

The basing of all moral obligation on social needs and social utility has been elaborated from the Marxist point of view by Howard Selsam in his *Socialism and Ethics,* but Selsam has been criticised by Franz Loeser, a German Marxist, on the grounds that this is not a Marxist treatment at all, but idealist, subjectivist and pragmatist.[2] Loeser argues that the only basis for morals is conformity to the *laws of social development.*

1. Certainly there is a moral obligation to conform to *all* scientific laws including those of social development and Marxism is the only system which makes the social necessity of the latter plain and insists on their importance.
2. But all science, both physical and social, exists and has significance only because it satisfies human needs. The prior and fundamental obligation is to satisfy these. Science and social law are *instrumental* and therefore secondary not prior.
3. Of course needs are subjective. How could they be otherwise? There can be no other basis for human activity and social organisation than the satisfaction of human needs, as Marx himself repeatedly said. Dislike of pain, desire for food and drink, are necessarily felt subjectively just as are the perception of tastes, sounds and colours. They are none the less objective for that. Surely this is a case of the dialectical interplay of subjective and objective.[3]
4. To reduce all human activity, psychology and morals to conformity to law, *excluding human needs* (or what is the same thing reducing them without remainder to the *need* to conform to social law) seems to me a terribly mechanical, inhuman, abstract and non-Marxist attitude.

Marxism must begin therefore with the basing of all obligation on the satisfaction of human needs. It proceeds to show what are the necessary conditions for the satisfaction of these needs, and thus new moral factors appear, new obligations and duties dependent upon the requirements of the situation in our period of capitalist contradiction and class struggle. This step in ethical development brings us to the class ethics of the workers. Since they can only fulfil their needs by

[1] See Hadfield, *Psychology and Morals,* and Flugel, *Man, Morals and Society.*

[2] "The most unkindest cut of all!" No one more than Howard Selsam has strongly criticised pragmatism from the Marxist standpoint.

[3] *The German Ideology,* p. 16. "The first premise of all human existence, the premise namely that man must be in a position to live in order to be able to make history. But life involves before everything else eating and drinking and habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means *to satisfy these needs.*" (Our italics.)

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the overthrow of capitalism this becomes a moral aim and the means to its achievement become moral too.

Two important consequences follow:

1. This class morality is far more than a class morality for two reasons:
   a. The victory of the working class is of benefit to all humanity.
   b. The removal of class contradiction for the first time makes possible the achievement of universal aims long given lip-service to by all men including the bourgeoisie, but which were incapable of realisation within a class system.
2. A tremendous moral conflict breaks out between the sacred principles of the bourgeois which they hold to be *right* because they secure their interests, and the revolutionary principles of the workers which contradict these bourgeois standards. Of course the bourgeois rights will be defended by *absolute ethical principles,* as they must appear to the bourgeoisie; the sacred right to rent, interest and profit, laissez faire freedom, property and all the rest of it. The workers deny the validity of these values and advance their own which they hold are ethically sound—"He that will not work neither shall he eat," down with all freedoms that enslave men, individual ownership of the means of production is anti-social, and in general the whole socialist criticism of the acquisitive society of capitalism.

Conclusions

We thus see that the difficulties and objections concerning Marxist ethics are all answered.

1. Moral standards of an objective kind are advanced which are based on human needs.
2. They change with changing conditions, but this very relativity is their strength and makes them authoritative. "It is because morality is always and in all places relative to circumstances, that it is binding to any time and place."
3. Working class morals are not purely relativistic, but have universal validity because they break the deadlock of bourgeois morality in the interests of all mankind.
4. The ideal aims of socialists are therefore not inconsistent with their class aims or with the relativity of their ethics, because they are judged not by an *outside* standard, but by the maximum welfare of the human species.
4. Moral standards not only can be and are produced *within* society, but only have meaning and significance if they are so produced. The idea that to have validity moral principles must be independent of the social progress they are to measure morally is bad ethics, bad logic, bad anthropology and bad philosophy. *All* standards in science, in art, in economics, in medicine and in society are necessarily produced within society.
6. Finally on the *means-end* controversy, Marxists hold that only those means are legitimate which in securing a classless society do not lose more than they gain in the process. They evaluate means not by absolute standards but *by consequences.* For absolute standards often turn out to be merely the attaching of supreme values to bourgeois interests. Or else, either through soft-headedness or unconscious class motivation, absolute adherence to a Moral Principle (like pacifism) is advocated in spite of the fact that the result is far more suffering than if it were violated. This is not a highly moral procedure, but an unmoral one.

Nevertheless Marxists are well aware that such general principles as the sacredness of human life, truthfulness, pity are of enormous importance; if one *has* to set them partially and temporarily aside there will be a real diminution of the good secured, that will be part of the price of victory and it may be a heavy one.

The Marxist is, however, able to add that if the course he adopts is *not* followed because of fidelity to these moral laws, then these moral laws themselves will be violated to a greater degree than is required by the class struggle, as is seen plainly enough in the consequences of allowing capitalism and imperialism with all their exploitation and cruelty and violence to continue; whereas victory in the class struggle at the cost of some always regrettable and deplorable evil consequences has the ultimate effect of permitting at last the fullest achievement of these very ideals in the history of mankind. Hence we find in Marxism "The categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a degraded, servile, neglected, contemplated being." (Marx.)

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A Caricature of the SDF

LIONEL MUNBY'S article in the December number of *Marxism Today* ("Marxism and the British Labour Movement, 1880-1900") is a caricature of the Social Democratic Federation (S.D.F.) The article is, in my opinion, grossly misleading, and harmful to our Party. Instead of trying to prove (what is true) that our Party has its roots in British history, and that Marxism was a practical approach to British politics, this article repeats all the disparaging slanders that have ever been uttered against us.

In the space allowed me for a reply I cannot give chapter and verse for my opinions, but I will supply references to anyone who wants them.

(1) This article is inaccurate in all its main points. It is not based on research, which would entail looking through, especially, the weekly journal of the S.D.F.—a slow job which none of us has yet tackled methodically. (I myself have perhaps used *Justice* more than anyone else, and therefore I can write with some knowledge of the facts.) To put forward statements as a basis for discussion can be highly dangerous if the statements happen to be untrue.

Where, then, do these ideas come from? In the absence of research, we have for many years relied on three sources of opinion about the S.D.F. In the first place, there are a few comments made by Marx and Engels in their correspondence; these are mainly critical of Hyndman, who had behaved very tactlessly and was mistrusted by them; these comments were made privately and were not intended as a considered judgment on the work of the S.D.F. Then there are the personal recollections of some of our older comrades who were members of the British Socialist Party (B.S.P.) just before the First World War; these recollections are bound to be unfavourable to Hyndman in particular, since he had by that time developed a chauvinism that was a betrayal of the Party's fight against War—though, even so, Lionel Munby's phrase, "politically corrupted", which suggests that Hyndman had deserted the class struggle, is misleading.

Our third source has been the general histories of the Labour movement (derived mainly from the work of G. D. H. Cole), which mention the S.D.F. in the appropriate places; there is also the more specific work of H. Pelling (*Origins of the Labour Party*) which has quite a bit to say about the S.D.F. and none of it complimentary. But I am sure neither Professor Cole nor Mr. Pelling would deny that they are not sympathetic towards the S.D.F. and that they have not done any detailed research into the activities of that party. As for the lesser derivative writers on the period, it suits anti-Marxists very well to denigrate the Marxist S.D.F.; and in tamely agreeing with them we are simply playing into their hands.

I am all for "learning lessons" from "mistakes" of the past. But for heaven's sake let us make sure what the mistakes were before trying to learn lessons from them. There is no short cut to history; we *must* find out the facts by patient research.

Besides, the S.D.F. is, after all, our very own pioneer party. If *we* do not do justice to the devoted work and sacrifice of these pioneers, who else will? It should be possible for Communist historians to combine intellectual honesty and accuracy with a warm partisanship for these people who are, after all, our own comrades of an earlier time.

(2) Lionel Munby seems to think that in criticising Hyndman he is disposing of the whole Party. I don't propose to defend Hyndman here, as I understand a university thesis on his life and work is in progress and I prefer to keep an open mind in the meantime. But I do want to put Hyndman into perspective.

In the early 1880s, when the first Socialist Party in Britain was in its formative stage, there was absolutely no tradition of Party discipline or a "Party line". The Party was formed as a federation of radical clubs, and only gradually acquired the characteristics that we now expect of a working class Party. In these radical clubs there was complete freedom of expression; members agreed on general principles, but within a wide margin they could grind their own axes. Individual members spoke to other clubs on their own pet subjects. Such an atmosphere develops personalitites rather than collective leadership. Although Hyndman had not had long experience of the radical clubs, he certainly took part in their activities in the early 1880s, as is shown, for example, in a report in *Labour Standard*

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of October 1st, 1881, that on the previous Sunday evening Adam Weiler addressed the Manhood Suffrage League on "The Communist Manifesto of Carl Marx and Frederic Engels of 1848" and that "H. M. Hyndman of the Democratic Federation entered into the discussion".

So it is not surprising that Hyndman, a forceful personality with experience of the world, should appear to stand out as a leading figure, especially as it was he who, having read Marx's *Capital,* took the initiative in drawing together an organisation with socialist aims.

But we must not exaggerate Hyndman's importance. Although a dominating character, he was only one of many personalities of the time. In a tiny organisation taking its first steps in politics, every member counts. One has only to look at the reports of S.D.F. activities in *Justice* to become familiar with the names of many of the comrades of those early days—men who turned out week after week in all weathers, and in spite of police persecution, to "preach the gospel of socialism". And within very wide limits those rank-and-file members, as well as leading members, were left free to develop their own latent talents. Some took up the problems of the unemployed, with an ardour that was worthy of the later N.U.W.M.; some turned to trade union organising; some discovered the potentialities of local government; some developed into propagandists. The impression one gets from reading through *Justice* in this period is of many-sided activity, though still on a very small geographical scale.

The historian who writes only about Hyndman has missed the point about the S.D.F. With all its weaknesses and immaturity it was developing into a genuine Party of the working class. So that even if Hyndman were as bad as his critics say—which he was not—this should not affect our judgment of the *Party.*

(3) It is when Lionel Munby writes of the Party itself that he makes me really angry. "The Social Democratic Federation", he says, "still stood on the touchline waving a clean red flag." He is writing of the 1890s, after the formation of the I.L.P.; and as he says "still", he must mean that he thinks the S.D.F. was "standing on the touchline" all through the 1880s too.

Now, Comrade Munby is not sneering at the cleanness or the redness of the flag—though it might sound a little like it. No, he is sneering at the Party itself. The Marxist Party, he says, was standing aside (presumably in clean red jerseys) watching other teams accumulate the mud and injuries of a game that is more than a game.

What nonsense is this? We have only to look at the various aspects of the class struggle in the period 1880-1900 to see that the S.D.F. was in the thick of the scrum.

Think of the unemployment campaigns of the mid-eighties and mid-nineties. In those slumps, when hundreds of thousands of men had nothing to fall back on but the Poor Law and charity, it was the S.D.F. which organised an agitation amongst them—marches through middle class areas, church parades to touch the consciences of Christians, Sunday breakfasts for the children, demonstrations in Trafalgar Square (is a Party which can bring 8,000 unemployed men marching into the Square, in filthy weather, behind the Red Flag and the S.D.F. banners, "standing on the touchline"?), mass deputations to the Guardians to ask for relief work—and with some success, for a number of Boards in London agreed to spend thousands of pounds on building and repair jobs; and with all this, consistent explanation of the causes of slumps and the socialist alternative.

Or think of the trade union organising in East London in 1888-89 which was the real background to the dock strike. Herbert Burrows and H. W. Hobart worked with Annie Besant in the matchgirls' strike; organising of match-makers continued into 1890, and Burrows then remarks that "the whole match agitation was a socialist work". Hobart helped to organise rope-makers, brick-makers and others. He also helped Will Thorne in the early days of the Gasworkers' recruiting, as did also Tom Mann and John Burns, and a number of local S.D.F. branches; the Gasworkers' Union was "a socialist work" if ever there was one. Just before the dock strike broke out, John Burns was helping to organise the "permanent" men at one of the docks. In that great strike, two of the three leaders were S.D.F. men, as everyone knows—their resignations from the Party soon afterwards because of disagreement with Hyndman over their conduct of the strike does not alter the fact that both had acquired their organising experience as members of the Party and with the support of local branches. In 1890, as the Gasworkers' Union spread over the country and as new trades councils were formed, many of the most active workers for trade unionism were S.D.F. members. So were many of the leading members of the Dockers' Union, both at the docks and in the union's campaign amongst agricultural labourers. S.D.F. members, such as James Macdonald, became leaders in the London Trades Council; they attended the T.U.C. and helped Keir Hardie and Tom Mann fight for a socialist policy for the whole movement.

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What about the class struggle in local government affairs? The most famous of all "humanisers" of the Poor Law, George Lansbury, was a member of the S.D.F. And he was not the only one. In Poplar he had the support of other S.D.F. members on the Board of Guardians. There was also Mary Gray in Battersea, and others whose names I cannot at the moment recall. At school board elections such warm-hearted and humane men as W. G. Pearson were put up as S.D.F. candidates—they demanded school meals as well as education for the half-starved children of the 1890s. One of the first Socialists to get on a town council was Will Thorne in West Ham, put up by the S.D.F. branch and backed by his union.

In General Elections too the S.D.F. played a part, though a small one. In the historic contest in West Ham in 1892, when Keir Hardie was returned as the first really independent Labour M.P., research in the local papers has revealed the extent to which the local S.D.F. members and S.D.F.-led Gasworkers' Union contributed to that victory.

As for more violent aspects of class struggle, one has only to remember the role of S.D.F. members in the great "free speech" fights in the 1880s, or in the battles with the "hooligans" during the Boer War, to see how ridiculous it is to speak of the S.D.F. "standing on the touch-line". Against the attacks of hooligans, organised with the connivance of the Tory Government against the anti-war movement, the S.D.F. acquitted themselves like heroes. Individual members were injured; one was nearly pushed under a train. It was the S.D.F. which organised its toughest members as stewards for such courageous pro-Boer speakers as Cronwright-Schreiner (who was persecuted by hooligans throughout his whole tour).

(4) Lionel Munby deliberately contrasts the S.D.F. with the I.L.P. It was the latter, he says, who carried on activities "right in the heart of the proletarian masses". So they did. But they had the advantage of ten years' experience of the S.D.F. in precisely similar activities. There is in fact no contrast to be made. Nor did the members of the two parties see themselves as rivals (whatever some of the leaders may have thought). When Tom Mann became secretary of the I.L.P. he wrote a pamphlet, *What is the I.L.P. Driving At?* in which he was at pains to emphasise the similarity of aims of the two parties, and the fact that in elections they supported each other. One might point also to various campaigns from 1893 onwards where, though unity was not achieved at top level, activities locally were carried on jointly (where both parties existed) or along parallel lines (where, as often happened, by a "gentlemen's agreement" there was *either* an I.L.P. branch *or* an S.D.F. branch according to which had got going first). In some towns "Socialist Societies" were founded, comprising I.L.P. and S.D.F. and unattached Socialists. In the Clarion Clubs, members of both parties collaborated in providing soup-kitchens for the destitute, in carrying socialism into the countryside, and in simply having a good time together. At one stage the desire for complete fusion was so strong amongst the rank-and-file of both parties as to force negotiations at top level to the extent of taking a ballot on the name of the new organisation.

To imagine the S.D.F. in isolation from the I.L.P. is to carry back into the nineteenth century our own unhappy experience of bans in the 1920s. There were no bans on Marxists in the period we are speaking of. How could there be, when it was the Marxist Party that had brought the idea of socialism to the working class and inspired all later socialist development?

(5) There were, however, differences between the S.D.F. and the I.L.P. Lionel Munby idealises the I.L.P. I don't intend, on the other hand, to disparage it. But the fact remains that only the S.D.F. had a clear and unambiguous conception of the class struggle, both as a thing that exists under capitalism and as a desirable means of organising the working class in the struggle towards socialism. The I.L.P. did recognise the existence of the class struggle (though they did not speak about it much), but they had no *theory* of class struggle. The S.D.F. was sometimes crude in its propaganda—to call the class struggle "class *war*" was perhaps unwise—but without that *theory* of class struggle in the formative stage of the socialist movement, might not the working class of Britain in our own day have been still in the unhappy position of the American working class, without an independent Party of its own? For we should remember that in the agitation for "independent Labour representation" which led to the formation of the Labour Party, the S.D.F. played its part as well as the I.L.P.—while never succumbing to the illusions of the I.L.P. about a *purely* Parliamentary way to socialism.

(6) There remains the question of the weaknesses, faults and mistakes of the S.D.F. and what lessons we can draw from them. I cannot in this brief space go into details. But I would suggest the following questions for later discussion based on research:

(i) Was it wrong to form a Socialist Party at all in the early 1880s? Engels, in 1881, proposed

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a *Labour* Party. Should the handful of convinced Marxists have gone all out, at that stage, for a Labour Party, or was it necessary first to form a Socialist Party as such? The I.L.P. was formed by Socialists who hoped it would become a *Labour* Party. Yet it turned out to be a Socialist Party quite similar in many respects to the S.D.F. It was only in 1900 that a federation of trade unions with Socialist Parties was achieved. Could this have been done earlier, if the Marxists had gone all out for it?

(ii) The great weakness of the S.D.F. was its failure, in spite of all the good trade union work done by many of its members, to develop a *theory* of industrial struggle related to political struggle and directed towards socialism. The I.L.P. also failed completely to develop such a theory. Was this inevitable? What were the reasons for this failure?

(iii) We assume nowadays that it was wrong to have two separate Socialist Parties. Should the S.D.F. have made greater efforts to achieve complete unity? Should the S.D.F. have made compromises in theory, and if so, in what way? Or would Marxism have been submerged in a united Party, under incipient MacDonaldism?

(iv) Was it really possible, within this period, that the Marxists, immature as they were, *could* have recognised the significance of the growth of monopolies, finance-capital, and colonial conquest (all of which they noticed individually) as a new stage in the development of capitalism?

(v) Did the S.D.F. under-estimate the potentialities of Parliamentary struggle? Or is it we who have under-estimated the S.D.F.'s conception of political struggle? The Party took Hyndman's consistent candidature at General Elections seriously. And another candidate, F. G. Jones, pointed out in 1894 that of the two alternatives, "open revolution" or "the revolution behind the ballot box", the S.D.F. "take our position behind the ballot box". BETTY GRANT

A Welcome Article

IT was a joy to me to read Lionel Munby on *Marxism and the British Labour Movement* in the December issue of *Marxism Today* and he is to be congratulated on raising for discussion this section of our movement which has been long neglected; all that is known of it is that which the bourgeois historians have chosen to tell us. So this article is one which, I trust, will be followed up with a much more extensive and intimate study. I read it over twice—but—I am still unsatisfied on a number of points. I am not sure that 1880 is the correct starting point. Marx died in 1883 and he lived for thirty-four years in London. He published the first volume of *Capital* in 1867 (the English translation was in 1886). The fact that both Marx and Engels were both very intimate and very active with the British Labour movement of that time raises the first query. Why was there no Socialist organisation formed during those years? We all know of Marx's influence with the Labour movement of that time. We also know that the political movement of the workers—the Chartists—had died down. Yet the old Master failed to have his influence on the working class politicians of that period in forming some organisation which could propagate his ideas. I know, of course, that the "refugee" organisation was formed around Marx during his lifetime. But the problem is why no *British* body was formed. Why? This is a question which in my view should start the period for the examination of the time of 1884, when the S.D.F. became an active exponent of Marxism, to 1900 and the formation of the L.R.C.

It is more than true to say the fault did not lie with Hyndman's sectarianism. In point of fact the early Socialists were all sectarians or opportunists. In my view Eric Hobsbawm pointed to the answer when he analysed the growth and development of British Imperialism and I agree with Munby when he emphasises this. But, all in all, I think we should start our exploration much earlier, at least from 1848, because the great revolutionary movements on the Continent had a profound repercussion on the thinking and the political movements in Britain.

My father was one of the early members of the S.D.F. through the local Ratepayers and Democratic club in Walthamstow, of which he was a member. I joined the S.D.F. in 1902 in Coventry, to which we had migrated. The dominating feature of this period I can well recall, as the endeavour to defend the S.D.F. as a *British* organisation and not a German-sponsored body. The big propaganda against us was that we were a branch of the German Socialists. The greatest part of the efforts of the comrades were spent on this. It was in some respects, in my view,

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due to this that the I.L.P. was formed—and here it is well to remember that the birth of the I.L.P. was in Yorkshire and the S.D.F. in London.

Munby dismisses the non-conformist influences and here I think he is wrong. This has been one of the biggest factors in turning the British movement away from Marxism, and never forget Yorkshire was one of the strongholds of this "rebellious religion". Coupled with the "German attack" was also the attack that the S.D.F. were atheists, and I can recall how in the later part of the nineties at least, while the Boer War was raging, all the Nonconformist chapels organised a crusade against the local S.D.F.

Yet during all this period, including long after 1902, I do not remember any discussion at all on the Theory of Socialism, and certainly Marxism as a philosophy was never discussed. The I.L.P. was formed somewhere about 1900 in Coventry and its founders were all Nonconformists. The great argument between the S.D.F. as it was and the I.L.P. was "Was Jesus a Socialist?" Yet during this period joint campaigns by both bodies were organised, especially on the Boer War, and on unemployment.

Now I do not suppose that these personal recollections alter one jot of the tenor of Munby's arguments, and they are probably all irrelevant to the point. But it is wrong just to label the S.D.F. as a sectarian body. In point of fact the leaders of the British working class in the trade unions and in the early political movements were to be found in the ranks of the S.D.F. They were part, and a real part, of the people's movement, but just because they lacked a theoretical understanding of Marxism they became the opportunists who ultimately gave us the MacDonalds, Snowden, Morrisons and Gaitskells. The first break came not in the defection of Morris and the Socialist League, as in general during this period there was unity of activity between the three bodies.

The great schism came in 1901, with the formation of the S.L.P. in Scotland and to a lesser extent in 1903, with the S.P.G.B. in London. In both cases the interpretation of Marxism was the battleground, and Marxist philosophy became the point of controversy. The publications of Kerr and Co. came from the U.S.A. via Glasgow to Britain, and with them Marxism became a topic. Up to 1900 the only Marxist literature available in English had been *Wage Labour and Capital, Value Price and Profit,* the *Communist Manifesto,* and in 1905 the Quelch translation of *Poverty of Philosophy.* The beginning of discussion of Marxism by the people did not begin until some eighteen years after the birth of a Marxist Socialist Party. Don't forget Hyndman's biggest crime was the blanketing of Marx. The programme of the S.D.F. *England For All* made no attempt to base this on Marx. It was written in the strain of a child of his own great brain. It was his egoism that hugged everything, no matter where from, to Hyndman and no one else. That was the great fault of this man. He retained tremendous influence with the British people right up to his death. Had he been more of a student and less of a "great man" he could have materially altered the whole path of the British working class movement.

Munby's whole article poses a series of questions and these must be answered if we are to understand why and how the British Labour movement has taken the road it has. He has done a real service to our movement in raising the question and it stands out as a great challenge to our historian friends to come into battle to give our historian friends to come into battle.

To get a clear picture in my view we must examine more closely the ideological influence of the religious movements in this country (after all many of the early unions sprung up round the chapel, especially the miners'), and secondly, why in the thirty-four years of Marx's life in England there did not arise a body round him, and thirdly, why it was that from 1894 onwards there were no Marxist theorists coming forward. In regard to the latter it would be well to take note of the influence of the Radical movement, and the Secularists.

Just a point or two in conclusion. It is not correct to make the sweeping assertion that Munby does that "the Social Democratic Federation stood aloof from the Independent Labour Party", for at least, to my knowledge, right up to 1905, in most cases the two bodies worked together. The clash began after the formation of the Labour Party in 1906 and with the fierce industrial struggles that broke out in the 1907-14 years. It is then there came the big cleavage in the working class, and this was due much more to the reaction of the working class in their industrial struggles, the work of the Syndicalists, the International Workers of the World—Tom Mann and all the ilk from Scotland.

FRANK JACKSON

SUGGESTIONS AND CRITICISMS

The Editorial Board would appreciate any suggestions, opinions and criticisms from readers of *Marxism Today*.

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